

BAKER'S ANTHOLOGY
f
ONE-ACT PLAYS

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Baker's Anthology of One-Act Plays

SELECTED AND EDITED
BY
LEROY PHILLIPS
AND
THEODORE JOHNSON



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FOREWORD

WE are rather overwhelmed with anthologies of one-act plays but, up to the present, they include surprisingly little fresh, previously unpublished work. Their compilers have frankly acknowledged their general dependence on plays easily available elsewhere. Several "model" plays have been so frequently repeated that certain anthologies suggest reprints.

Our experience as play distributors has shown that the assembling or reassembling in one volume of several short plays, which are already published in the convenient and inexpensive paper-bound playbooks of convention, does not satisfy the expectation of students and readers. In such a collection our audience is looking for examples of dramatic literature and craftsmanship which are altogether new and arresting. These should be the work, not only of playwrights with established reputations, but there should be a recognition of the efforts of younger writers for the stage, whose short plays show marked distinction and promise.

To provide such a book of plays has been our aim. The present group includes nothing hitherto available in print. The work, about equally divided between British and American authors, sustains the highest standards and represents the entire range of the one-act play from farce to tragedy. In some instances experienced dramatists have prepared examples of particular types of plays for special inclusion in this anthology.

The collection, designed for use by schools, colleges, study clubs, amateur societies and individuals is offered with confidence. In the hands of competent and enthusiastic teachers, such fresh material must be a practical and inspiring help in directing students toward dramatic appreciation and composition. Reading and study clubs will be attracted by the novelty and variety of these widely differing plays. Brief critical and biographical notes are included for their use. Amateur producing groups will welcome so exceptional an opportunity to secure brilliant and unhackneyed plays.

TEA

A Play

By

WILLIAM G. B. CARSON

William G. B. Carson is Assistant Professor of English at Washington University, St. Louis. Many plays have come from his pen, but his greatest success has been with "TEA." Here is found a conflict of emotions held together with a strong thread of romanticism. It has in its structural make-up those values, too often lacking in published plays,—a sincerity of purpose and a refusal to sacrifice realities to the demands of the commercial theatre. Only a dramatist of high ability could take a story, similar to that of the interrupted romance of Professor Carson's leading characters, and make of it a living, breathing thing. Our sympathies are quickened, and our interest is held at high pitch, as the human little story marches unhesitatingly on to its only possible dénouement.

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CHARACTERS

MISS EMMA NORRIS.

WILLIAM BURD.

MRS. PIERCE.

MRS. HENLEY.

NORMA PIERCE.

TEA

SCENE.—*The sitting-room of a small-town home belonging to people of modest means. The furnishings are of the kind bought at time-payment houses or ordered by catalogue from a large mail order establishment, the kind that, attempting distinction without either taste or expense, achieves only commonness, yet does not descend to vulgarity. In the wall facing the audience there is a door leading to the front hall. In the wall to the right of the actors and well down-stage, another door opens into the dining-room. In the left wall, a window is almost concealed behind some showy imitation lace curtains. Down C. stands a small table supporting a lamp; there is a chair at its right, and another behind it. Down R., facing obliquely toward the audience, stands a comfortable looking rocking-chair. There is another table to the right of the rear door.*

(When the curtain rises, the room is empty; but almost immediately the front door is heard to open and close, and MRS. HENLEY, a middle-aged woman with a plump figure and a complacent smile, and obviously "dressed-up," appears in the rear door.)

MRS. HENLEY (*calling*). Mis' Pierce! Oh, Mis' Pierce!

MRS. PIERCE (*off right*). Yes. Here I am.

MRS. HENLEY (*coming down into the room*). 'Most ready to go?

MRS. PIERCE. Yes. Just a minute. 'Tain't half-past three yet, is it?

MRS. HENLEY (*seating herself comfortably in the*

rocker). No, not quite. But I kind o' thought maybe we might get there early.

MRS. PIERCE (*appearing in the door at R., carrying a tray with some tea-things on it*). Well, I'm just about ready. I had to fix Miss Emma's tea-things for her. (*She is a sparely built woman with sharp features and a voice to match, but with, nevertheless, a suggestion of kindness about her.*) She's always so particular. Everything's got to be just so, or she won't touch it.

MRS. HENLEY (*brushing off her waist*). That's the old maid in her.

MRS. PIERCE. There you spoke the truth. Old maid! Them two words just tells everything about Emma Norris.

MRS. HENLEY (*rocking*). Oh, well, we can't all of us—I suppose there has to be old maids.

MRS. PIERCE (*going into the dining-room, whence her voice carries back*). I suppose so. Still, Emma's different from most. Thank the Lord, they ain't all like her. (*She returns with a plate of sandwiches. She stops to show them to MRS. HENLEY.*) Look at these sandwiches. I have to cut 'em just so, or she won't take a bite o' one. That's what takes so long, trimmin' and cuttin' till they're just so.

MRS. HENLEY (*who, having helped herself to a choice one, settles back comfortably to enjoy it*). Why d'you bother? Anyway, she'd eat 'em if she was hungry enough.

MRS. PIERCE (*apologetically*). Oh, well, she can't help it. As you say, it's the old maid in her. Same way with her room—always just so—and with a pot of flowers in the window. She seems to take out her natural affections makin' a fuss over flowers, since her old mother died. She'd keep a cat if I'd let her. But I ain't runnin' a cat boardin'-house, not yet!

MRS. HENLEY. I guess not! She's queer. I sometimes wonder if she's altogether right in her mind, the way she makes over things. And the way she stalks about of an evenin', with that long step of hers, and always in black! Makes me think of a ghost.

MRS. PIERCE. Poor thing! That's just what she is—a ghost.

MRS. HENLEY. What?

MRS. PIERCE. The ghost o' what she used to be. That's why I feel sorry for her, and put up with all her notions and fol-de-rols. I've had my troubles, Lord knows, more'n my share, maybe, but—oh, well—— (*She takes her hat from the table at the back of the room, and puts it on.*) Have I got it on straight?

MRS. HENLEY. Yes. (*Resuming an interesting subject.*) Poor thing, of course, I'm sorry for her, too,—especially now.

(*MRS. HENLEY has the manner of one who knows something of importance.*)

MRS. PIERCE (*sharply*). Now? Why now?

MRS. HENLEY. Well—— (*She edges her chair a bit closer.*) I ain't supposed to tell, but I know it won't go no further.

MRS. PIERCE. What won't?

MRS. HENLEY. Henry told me yesterday; he heard it from Professor Bartlett. She's going to be let out.

MRS. PIERCE. Let out?

MRS. HENLEY. Yes—dismissed.

MRS. PIERCE. So it's come, has it? I never thought it would. (*Bitterly.*) I never thought they'd have the meanness to do it!

MRS. HENLEY. They say she's too old-fashioned.

MRS. PIERCE. Old-fashioned! Granny's foot! She's the best teacher we ever had in this town, for all her queerness. They're a pack o' ninnies on the Board, and I wouldn't mind sayin' so to their faces.

MRS. HENLEY (*doubtfully*). Well——

MRS. PIERCE. I wonder. There was a letter from the Board come for her, second mail. (*She gets it from the table up-stage and looks at it hostilely.*) Do you suppose that's it?

MRS. HENLEY. Yes. Professor Bartlett said they was goin' to tell her right off so's she could look around a bit.

MRS. PIERCE. A lot o' good that'll do her! What

sort o' work do they think she can get? How do they expect her to put bread in her mouth? This is a nice sort o' thing to come home to!

MRS. HENLEY. How do you suppose she'll take it?

MRS. PIERCE. How would you take it if you was in her shoes? (*There is a ring at the door-bell.*) Now, who do you suppose that is?

MRS. HENLEY. Mis' Allen, most prob'ly. She said she might look in on her way over.

MRS. PIERCE. Come on in. (*WILLIAM BURD appears in the doorway, hat in hand. He is a heavy-set man with a strong, ruddy face and iron-gray hair, dressed well, if not in the best of taste. There is about him the manner of a man who has succeeded and who is used to getting what he wants without making a fuss about it. Surprised.*) Oh, I thought ——

WILLIAM (*without waiting for her to finish*). Excuse me, is this Mrs. Pierce's house?

MRS. PIERCE. Yes.

WILLIAM. I am looking for Miss Emma Norris. She lives here, don't she?

MRS. PIERCE (*a bit suspiciously. He may be a book-agent*). Yes. But she isn't home now.

WILLIAM. Do you expect her back soon?

MRS. PIERCE. Well—she's very busy. Is it anything important?

MRS. HENLEY. Business?

WILLIAM (*noting their suspicions with amusement*). Well, it's not exactly business—I'm not a book-agent—but I guess you'd say it was important. You see, I've come ten thousand miles to see her.

MRS. PIERCE. Good gracious!

MRS. HENLEY (*at the same time*). My goodness! Ten thou—to see Miss Emma Norris! Good land! She must o' come into some money.

WILLIAM. Do you think she'll be home soon?

MRS. PIERCE (*not yet recovered*). I—no—yes. Yes, school must be out now. She ought to be here any minute. I was just leavin' her tea-things for her. Won't you sit down and wait for her?

WILLIAM. Thank you. (*As he sits by the table.*) But, if you ladies were going out, don't let me keep you.

MRS. PIERCE. Oh, no. We was just going up to Mis' Hobbs' to a meeting of the Literary Circle.

MRS. HENLEY. Ain't it funny? We was just talkin' about poor Miss Emma when you rung the bell. We was just sayin' how sorry we was for her.

WILLIAM. Sorry for her? What's the matter?

MRS. HENLEY. It's that fool school board. They've dismissed her.

WILLIAM (*angrily*). What? Dismissed her?

MRS. PIERCE (*pointing to the envelope on the table*). There's her notice. Lord knows what she'll do now, poor thing. She ain't a millionaire.

(WILLIAM picks up the letter and glowers at it. Then he replaces it on the table.)

WILLIAM. Who's on the Board now? Are they still packing it with the biggest sap-heads in town? (*He rises.*) I'd like to have a talk with them. Dismiss her! I'll —

MRS. HENLEY (*leaning forward*). Yes?

WILLIAM. I'll — (*He stops short, arrested by a new thought. Then his face lights up.*) After all, what difference does it make?

MRS. HENLEY. What's that?

WILLIAM. I say it don't make any difference now. She don't need to worry.

MRS. HENLEY (*after a look at Mrs. PIERCE*). Has she come into some money?

WILLIAM. Eh? (*He looks at her sharply.*) Has she — Hum! Well, you might say so, I suppose. At least, she's going to. Anyway, as I said, she don't need to worry. A woman like her isn't likely to want.

MRS. HENLEY. A woman like her? Ahem—I don't just understand.

WILLIAM. I mean—a woman with her smartness and good looks won't be neglected.

(*The women look at each other in astonishment.*)

MRS. HENLEY. You know her? Miss Emma, I mean.

WILLIAM. Yes, of course I know her. Used to, at least.

MRS. HENLEY. How long's it been since you seen her?

WILLIAM. Twenty years.

MRS. HENLEY. Twenty years!

MRS. PIERCE. Most of us change lots in twenty years.

WILLIAM. Yes, we do, but—I can see her now just like I've seen her for twenty years, her arms full of flowers and her eyes sort o' lit up with the joy of being alive. She was the finest girl in this town. (*Behind his back, MRS. HENLEY raises her eyes and gives MRS. PIERCE a look.*) But don't let me keep you ladies.

MRS. HENLEY (*settling back in her chair*). There ain't any particular hurry.

WILLIAM (*rising and speaking with an authority that brings the reluctant MRS. HENLEY to her feet*). No, no, I don't want to keep you. You must go. You see, I want to surprise her here—by myself.

MRS. PIERCE. Very well, then. We'll be off. Just make yourself at home. Good-bye.

(*She goes to the door. Having shaken hands with WILLIAM, MRS. HENLEY follows her.*)

MRS. HENLEY. Good-bye. Pleased to have met you.

WILLIAM. Good-bye.

(*The women go out c. MRS. HENLEY'S voice carries back.*)

MRS. HENLEY. Ten thousand miles! Miss Emma Norris!

(*The front door is heard to close. WILLIAM stands a moment, thinking. Then he takes from his pocket a cigar-case of Oriental make. From this he takes a cigar. He bites off the end and puts the cigar between his lips, and lights it. Looking about for an ash-tray, he discovers a small souvenir dish on the centre table. As he picks it up, his eyes light on EMMA'S letter from the school board. He contem-*

plates it frowningly. Then, replacing the dish, he takes a check-book from his pocket, writes out a check, which he puts loose in his coat pocket, and puts the check-book away. Then, dish in hand, he crosses to the rocking-chair and sits down. The dish he deposits on a small chair within his reach. For a moment he smokes in silence. Then he takes out his watch and contemplates happily the picture in its case. Hearing the front door close, he hurriedly puts the watch away and stands up. MISS EMMA NORRIS appears in the c. door. She is a slender woman actually little over forty, but with a worn, colorless face, marked here and there with lines that might belong to a woman of fifty-five or even more. Her eyes are lustreless. Such a face might be saved by pretty hair, but her hair is not pretty. It is neither gray nor black but a mixture of both, and it is of the sort which cannot be made to look neat. She is dressed in rusty black, and wears a plain black hat devoid of ornament. On the whole, she has the look of a woman who has long ago abandoned all effort at self-adornment, and resigned herself to inevitable plainness. But in her hand she carries a pink rose. Seeing a strange man in the room, she stops short. He, too, is surprised, for at first he does not recognize her.)

EMMA. Excuse me.

(She starts to leave, but he stops her.)

WILLIAM. Wait. This isn't Em—Miss Emma Norris?

EMMA. Yes. I am Miss Norris.

WILLIAM (overcome). Emma! (She looks at him in amazement.) Emma, don't you know me? I've come back. (The rose falls from her hand to the floor.)

EMMA. Will!

WILLIAM. Yes, it's me. It's Will. (There is an embarrassed pause.) You didn't know me. Have I changed that much?

EMMA. Yes.

WILLIAM. It's been twenty years—a long time. (*She looks at him as if prompted to say something, but changes her mind. He is evidently struggling to master his thoughts and also to hide them.*) Aren't you glad to see me, Emma?

EMMA. Of course I am. (*With a little nervous laugh.*) But you surprised me so, and I can't quite realize it's you. Won't you sit down?

WILLIAM (*sitting in the rocker as she sits by the table*). Took you by surprise. That's what I planned on doing.

EMMA. You certainly succeeded. When did you come to town?

WILLIAM. On the two-fifty-eight. I came right up here.

EMMA (*for want of something better to say*). Did you have any trouble finding the house?

WILLIAM. Oh, come now. I haven't been gone as long as that. Besides, I met Ed Summers at the depot, and he told me where you lived.

EMMA. You didn't find the town much changed.

WILLIAM. Darn little!

EMMA. Do you—do you intend to stay here long?

WILLIAM (*confused*). I—I don't know. My plans aren't fixed. But 't isn't likely I'll stay long—day or so, maybe.

EMMA. I'm certainly glad you came to see me.

WILLIAM. Of course. You know I—I wouldn't go away without seeing you.

EMMA. I should hope not. To think you've come back!

WILLIAM. I always intended to—some day.

EMMA. I declare, I seem to have completely forgotten my manners. (*Rising.*) I'll take off my hat, and we'll have some tea.

WILLIAM (*surprised*). Tea?

EMMA. Yes. Mrs. Pierce always has some ready for me when I get home from school.

WILLIAM. I didn't know you drank tea. I remember you didn't use to like it.

EMMA. You have a good memory. I drink it now. It wasn't that I didn't like it.

WILLIAM. It wasn't? I always thought—what was it, then?

EMMA (*ignoring his question*). I've been drinking it every afternoon for fifteen years. (*She has been taking off her hat.*) Just wait a minute. I'll get another cup, and the hot water.

(*She goes out R. He rises, a look of great distress as well as perplexity in his eyes.*)

WILLIAM (*it is forced out of him*). Good God! (*Furtively he looks at the picture, and then at the door.*) God!

(*He puts his watch away again, and sits down again. When she returns, he is master of himself. EMMA returns with a pot of hot water, and a cup and saucer.*)

EMMA. I forgot to ask. Maybe you don't drink tea. I believe most men don't.

WILLIAM. Well, this one does. Caught the habit in India.

EMMA (*as she makes the tea*). India! Have you been there?

WILLIAM. Live there—Calcutta. That's where I've come from. But I haven't asked—how are you, Emma? You—you've been sick, haven't you?

EMMA. Me sick? Oh, no! I'm always well. And you?

WILLIAM. Haven't had a sick day since I left. Haven't had time.

EMMA. The same old Will.

WILLIAM. You bet! The same old Will. I haven't changed a bit except in looks. Had a bit of frost in the higher altitudes and (*Patting his stomach.*) I've put on considerable here.

EMMA (*smiling*). Barrie would call that your prosperity.

WILLIAM. Barrie? Oh, yes, that English writer.

Saw one of his plays in London. Smart fellow, but full of notions.

EMMA. Now you mustn't say anything against Barrie. He's one of my idols. He says what other people just feel but can't even think.

WILLIAM. All right then, I won't.

EMMA. How will you take your tea?

WILLIAM. Lemon and three lumps.

EMMA. Three! The same old sweet-tooth.

WILLIAM. You bet.

EMMA. And lemon. You would. (*With a slight suggestion of scorn in her voice.*) Everybody in this town takes cream—that is, everybody except me. (*She holds out a cup, and he crosses to take it.*) A sandwich. (*Fretfully.*) You'll have to excuse their looks. Mrs. Pierce seems to be constitutionally incapable of cutting a piece of bread straight.

WILLIAM (*helping himself*). These look all right to me.

(*Taking his refreshments, he returns to the rocking-chair, where he has some little trouble arranging things so that they will stay on his knees. He drops a good many crumbs. These EMMA notices with a frown, which, however, she manages to conceal.*)

EMMA (*moving to the chair beside the table*). Perhaps you had better put your plate on that chair.

WILLIAM (*taking the hint*). I guess I'd better. Been knocking about, you know. Lost a lot of my parlor tricks. Now let's hear all about you.

EMMA. Oh, there's nothing to tell about me. (*With a touch of bitterness.*) Nothing interesting has ever happened to me.

WILLIAM. Oh, come! It's not as bad as that. (*She is silent.*) Your mother's dead, Ed said. I'm sorry.

EMMA. Mother died five years ago.

WILLIAM. And the rest?

EMMA. Both married. Clara lives out West; I haven't seen her since Mother died. Hannah lives in Des Moines. Mother and I stayed on here.

WILLIAM. Been teaching school ever since I went away?

EMMA. Ever since.

WILLIAM. Must of been pretty hard.

EMMA. No. It hasn't been—hard. (*Changing the subject.*) But now you must tell me about yourself. You must have a lot to tell. You've travelled a great deal, I suppose.

WILLIAM. Yep. Been round the world.

EMMA. At the beginning, after you left here, you went to South America.

WILLIAM. Yes—to the Argentine.

EMMA. You used to write then. Then to Chile—then to Peru——

WILLIAM (*pleased*). You remember? Poor country that—nothing but dirt and fleas and *manana, manana*.

EMMA. No, that wasn't all. Don't you remember?

WILLIAM. What?

EMMA. Wait a minute. (*She is smiling now. She rises and goes up to the door.*) Wait. (*She hurries out. He follows her to the door and looks after her. Then he turns, evidently in a quandary. He frowns and paces a step or two. Suddenly he turns toward the table by the door, on which he has laid his hat, but with a revulsion of feeling and a stifled exclamation of "Cad!" he turns away and walks toward the rocking-chair. He takes the check from his pocket and looks at it and then off into space. In his eyes there is an expression of deep pain. Hearing her coming back, he hurriedly pockets the check and sits down. One notices when EMMA returns that her step is lighter and she seems younger. She holds up a quaintly carved little wooden box.*) Now, don't tell me you don't remember.

(*He takes the box and looks at it thoughtfully.*)

WILLIAM. Sure enough! I'd forgotten it. You've kept it all these years!

EMMA. Of course I have. I love it. (*Taking it again and handling it with a sort of caress.*) It's so—so different. I keep the little things I like best in it. (*A*

bit wistfully.) I call it my "treasure chest." (*She opens it and takes out a necklace of rough stones. In the tone of an exhibitor.*) These came from Santiago, Chile. Did you ever see them before?

WILLIAM. Well, well! You kept them too!

EMMA. And wore them. That is—I used to. (*She puts them back in the box and closes it. As she places it on the centre table.*) After that, you forgot us.

WILLIAM (*hotly*). I never forgot you! Never!

EMMA. No? How were we to know that?

WILLIAM. You're right. I quit writing. But I didn't forget. The truth is—well, nothing much seemed to be coming my way, and I got kind o' discouraged and just a mite ashamed.

EMMA. I always knew you'd succeed.

WILLIAM. You knew more than I did, then.

EMMA. Where did you go from South America?

WILLIAM. To China—Hongkong, Canton, Peking; then to Bangkok—stayed there five years.

EMMA. Bangkok! I know all about that. It is the capital of Siam and has a population of 629,000. "The King of Siam has magnificent palaces there, and the Buddhist priests occupy temples gorgeous with silver and gold."

WILLIAM. How do you know all that?

EMMA. Our geography book. That's how I do my travelling. What a wonderful place it must be!

WILLIAM. Wonderful? Bangkok? Well, I never noticed it. If you're looking for wonderful bad smells —

EMMA. Oh, don't! You oughtn't to have noticed such things.

WILLIAM. Couldn't help it.

EMMA. Then don't tell me about them. There are no bad smells in my Bangkok, just palaces and temples gorgeous with silver and gold. But I know I'd like even the smells. We don't have them here.

WILLIAM. I should say not!

EMMA. I don't know why it is, but I've always wanted to go to Siam. And India?

WILLIAM. India's all right. Lots of dirt there too, but it's a big country and you can't get away from it.

EMMA. It must be wonderful.

WILLIAM (*hesitating*). Would you like to see it?

EMMA. What's the use of my liking? I'll never see anything but this place.

WILLIAM (*retreating*). Don't you ever go away?

EMMA. Oh, I went up to Des Moines once to see Hannah, and down to St. Louis one Christmas to hear "The Messiah." Then one summer I went to a conference at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

WILLIAM (*shocked*). That all? You've been right here in this cemetery all these years?

EMMA. That's all.

(There is a pause. She looks straight before her; he looks at her. He rises, evidently irresolute, and carries his cup back to the centre table. There, the letter, which is hidden from her by some books, confronts him. He sees it with something of a start. Then with sudden determination he turns toward her, but stands behind her chair where she cannot see his face.)

WILLIAM (*feelingly*). Emma.

EMMA. Yes?

WILLIAM. You and I used to be mighty good—good pals once.

EMMA. Yes.

WILLIAM. You haven't forgotten?

(She shakes her head.)

EMMA. Twenty years ago.

WILLIAM. You know, I always hoped that some day—that some day we might be something more than that. *(She starts slightly, but is silent.)* That's why I went away. I wanted to fix myself so that I could ask you.

EMMA (*half-whispered*). Fix yourself?

WILLIAM. Yes. You know what I was twenty years ago. I didn't amount to shucks. Clerkin' in Bradley's store. And you were teaching in the school. I hadn't

the nerve. So I went away to make something out of myself. I made up my mind that I'd never say anything to you till I could give you a good home with no work to do, and no worry, about money anyhow. Well, it was hard pulling at first—those first years. Oh, I was never down to bed-rock, but I had to sweat, and I never could be sure just where I'd be next month. I couldn't get enough to give you what I'd promised myself. So I got discouraged and roamed about from pillar to post, never sticking very long to any one thing because I always figured that maybe I could get something better. You know it all—the first five years. After that things went better. I got good jobs and saw lots of the world. But I was always waiting till I got something just a mite better. I got ashamed to write, somehow, and then I never got started again. But I thought a lot. And I always figured that some day I'd come home and get you. It's taken twenty years, but I'm here. And I've kept my promise to myself.

EMMA. How did you know I'd be waiting?

WILLIAM. I just felt you would. You know, Emma, when I went away, I felt sure that you—that you felt about me like I did about you. I never thought about anybody else, and (*With a little laugh.*) maybe I was nervy, but I sort of took it for granted that you wouldn't think about anybody else either.

EMMA (*low*). And yet you said nothing to me.

WILLIAM. You see, I had promised myself. (*She rises suddenly and crosses to the window, where she stands for a moment with her back to him.*) Emma!

EMMA (*turning on him*). Oh, how could you be so cruel? How could you? How could you?

WILLIAM. Cruel?

EMMA. Yes, cruel—cruelly selfish! You weren't thinking of me. You say you loved me, and you thought I loved you—yet you went off and left me without a word—for twenty years!

WILLIAM. I never thought it would be so long.

EMMA. Five years, then—one year, even! To go at all that way! Did you ever stop to consider what I might

be thinking? How was I to know? What if I did believe you cared, what was I to think when you went off like that? What was I to feel?

WILLIAM. Emma, I wasn't selfish—if I know anything at all, I know that. I may have been cruel—I don't understand, but you may be right. But I wasn't selfish. I was crazy for you. I didn't dare stay near you. I wanted to spare you.

EMMA. Spare me? What?

WILLIAM. Work and hardship.

EMMA. And what have I had here?

WILLIAM. Well ——

EMMA. Work and hardship—hardship a good deal worse than any you might have brought me. You “spared” me my right to live. Oh, I wouldn't have minded so much, it wouldn't be so bad if you hadn't said you knew I loved you, and you went off anyway without leaving me a thing to hope for.

WILLIAM. You did love me?

EMMA. Yes, I did. You were right. For five years, I clung to your letters. Then they stopped, and I became what I am to-day. Look at me. You didn't know me when I came in. Then, when you did, you were shocked. Don't deny it; I saw it in your face. Oh, I didn't get like this overnight. But twenty years is a long time. I'm the town old maid, not the typical, the extreme—the very thing I'd sworn I'd never be. You can't teach school for twenty years without getting its brand on you, and I've got it deeper than most. For twenty years I've done nothing but stay in this hole and teach other women's children—you won't know what that means to a woman—other women's children! I've done it so long I've ceased to be human. That's what your promise has done to me. And it's killed my promise to myself. What would all that you “spared” me have been beside this? What if I had had a little hardship, and had to worry now and then? I was young. At least, I'd have had someone to love me, someone to love, perhaps a home of my own, and, and —— *(She breaks down and turns again to the window. He sinks down into the rocking-chair. For a*

moment neither speaks. She is the first to regain her self-control.) Forgive me. I'm ashamed of myself. I didn't mean to say all I did, only ——

WILLIAM. I never thought of things that way before.

EMMA. I know you didn't, and I'm ashamed of myself. I'm not usually so melodramatic. I wouldn't have done it, only I guess I'm kind of unstrung. I just lost hold of myself. Please say you'll forget what I said.

WILLIAM (*shaking his head*). That's asking more than is possible. But I see now you were right. I was a brute.

EMMA. No, no! You mustn't say that. You couldn't be. You meant it for the best.

WILLIAM. God knows I did. (*There is a pause. With the tips of her fingers, she wipes a tear from her cheek.*) At any rate, Emma, you don't need to worry about the future. (*She looks at him questioningly.*) You don't have to work any more. I told you I'd come back to get you, and I haven't changed my mind. We can start as soon as you're ready. The sooner, the better.

EMMA. No, Will.

WILLIAM. What?

EMMA. I can't marry you—now.

WILLIAM. Why not?

EMMA. There are lots of reasons.

WILLIAM. I don't see 'em. You admitted you cared for me.

EMMA. I did, twenty—fifteen years ago—less than that.

WILLIAM. You don't now?

EMMA. I don't even know you.

WILLIAM. Emma!

EMMA. Can't you see that we are strangers? I'm not the girl you loved twenty years ago. And you're not the boy I used to care for, even if in some ways you are "the same old Will." Why, we didn't even know each other when we met!

WILLIAM. We haven't changed inside. Looks don't count.

EMMA. Oh yes, they do. They're symbolic—like that

tea. Sit down. (*She sits, and so does he.*) You remember, a while ago, I wouldn't tell you why I started drinking tea? (*He nods.*) It was five years after you went away—when you stopped writing. It was the token of my surrender. For I had had my promise to myself too. I surrendered my promise never to be an old maid, and afternoon tea was my symbol of old maidhood.

WILLIAM. Now just wait. You're running away too fast. I know we're not kids, and we can't be silly and sentimental like them. But we can love each other, just the same.

(*She shakes her head.*)

EMMA. No, Will. It's too late.

WILLIAM. Too late? Nonsense! I'm only forty-six, and you're not that old.

EMMA (*holding up the teapot*). You forget the symbol. Years haven't much to do with your age. You're as old as you feel and as you look. Nobody would ever take me for less than fifty, at the very least. I look years older than you. And I feel that old. It's true what they say about me—oh, don't look so fierce; they don't say it to my face—I am an old maid of the worst sort.

WILLIAM. This is all nonsense, and I'm not going to let you ruin the rest of your life as I've ruined the first part.

EMMA. It isn't nonsense. Listen. I haven't been thrown with any men for fifteen years or more. And I don't suppose you've been thrown much with women.

WILLIAM (*positively*). No!

EMMA. There! Then, there's your smoking. I don't like tobacco.

WILLIAM. I'll quit it.

EMMA. No. You couldn't do that—even for me.

WILLIAM. You mean to say that I care more for it than I do for you?

EMMA. You haven't seen me for twenty years—or heard of me for fifteen. But I dare say you've had it with you every day. Haven't you?

WILLIAM. Yes. But I'm not a slave to it.

EMMA. Of course not. But you'd miss it. You'd begin to want it again, and it would be me who kept you from it. You couldn't help yourself, Will. If we'd been used to each other, or even to other men and women—perhaps even if I were different—it might have been possible. But as it is—Will, can't you see that it's out of the question?

(Can it be that she hopes he will say no? He does.)

WILLIAM. Emma, this is all bosh. There's no reason why you shouldn't marry me, and you're going to—this afternoon. Your theories are all right, but I deal in facts.

(He seizes her by the shoulders, evidently much moved. He looks at her, and her eyes fall.)

EMMA *(weakly)*. Don't, Will.

(He drops his hands, but continues to look at her.)

WILLIAM. Well? *(Suddenly she is overcome by shyness, and turns away to avoid his stare. Her eyes fall on the letter on the table. Nervously, not realizing what she is about, she opens it and automatically looks at the contents. As she reads, understanding comes into her eyes. She begins to laugh hysterically.)* That's right. Laugh at 'em! You've got 'em beat now. Don't wait till June. Quit 'em cold this afternoon. It's no more than they deserve.

(For a moment she shares his mood. Then she starts, and an expression of doubt, of fear, comes into her eyes.)

EMMA *(she can scarcely say it)*. Will—do you—know what's in this letter?

WILLIAM. Well, the ladies who were here when I came——

EMMA. Yes?

WILLIAM. They told me it was—but what's the use of going into that now? It's done with.

EMMA (*drawing away from him—her voice hard*).
You knew it all along.

WILLIAM. Y-yes.

(*She looks old again, older than before.*)

EMMA. You must go away, Will.

WILLIAM. What?

EMMA. I can't marry you.

WILLIAM. Why not?

EMMA. Because people who don't love each other oughtn't to marry.

WILLIAM. But I do ——

EMMA (*interrupting him*). Will, please! You may not know it, but in your heart of hearts you hoped I'd say no.

WILLIAM. That's not true!

EMMA. It's pity, not love. Love! Love! Look at me! What have I to do with love? Look at me! You couldn't! And I—don't—love—you. (*He turns away.*) I'm sorry, Will—so sorry.

WILLIAM. I wish I could prove it to you.

EMMA. There is no proof.

WILLIAM. Is this to be the end of my plan—that's kept me going all these years?

EMMA. Get another plan. Or, better still, keep on dreaming about the boy and girl who used to be but are gone. Let them be as real to you as Siam is to be.

WILLIAM (*harshly*). I'm not a dreamer.

EMMA. Try to be one. Dreams can help so much when you haven't other things.

(*He turns toward the door, but stops. Putting his hand in his pocket, he draws out the check, and, after contemplating it a moment, holds it out to her. She looks at him inquiringly.*)

WILLIAM. I fixed this up to be a sort of wedding-present. I want you to have it anyway.

EMMA. Why, Will—I can't take money from you.

WILLIAM. Why not? For old times' sake.

EMMA. Surely you understand.

WILLIAM. Oh, you mean because it's me. Won't you ever forgive me?

EMMA. No, no! It's not that! Of course it's not that! There's nothing to forgive. You meant to do what was right. I don't know, but it just seems that, when we start out to live our lives, we find a lot of doors in front of us. We've got to go through one. Then it closes behind us, and we can't ever come back. You just chose the wrong door, Will. (*He opens his fingers and the check flutters to the floor. Then, without a word, he goes.*) Will!

(*But she hasn't called him loud enough. The front door is heard to close. She sways a little. Seeing the crumpled check on the floor, she picks it up and reads it dully. Again her lips form his name. Regaining her composure, she starts to tear the check, but stops and looks at it again. Then she slowly tears it—twice—and puts the pieces into the "treasure-chest." The front door is heard to open. She starts and listens intently.*)

NORMA (*off rear*). C'm on in. (EMMA *sits behind the table, and unsteadily pours herself a little more tea. She raises the cup to her lips.*) C'm on in. There ain't anybody home 'cept Miss Emma. (NORMA, *a child of twelve, appears in the hall. In a whisper to someone behind her.*) Ssh! She's in there—drinkin' her tea.

CURTAIN

LITTLE RED SHOES

A Comedy

By

HAROLD BRIGHOUSE

Harold Brighthouse is the characteristic playwright of that epochal English Repertory Movement which Miss Horniman inaugurated at Manchester. His Lancashire character plays, mostly comedies, express the spirit of the locality. Ventures into other fields have been occasional but have not given the name of Mr. Brighthouse its exceptional prominence as a writer for the stage. Among his already published full length plays the following are of outstanding interest: "HOBSON'S CHOICE," "THE BANTAM V. C.," "GARSIDE'S CAREER," and "MARY'S JOHN." His one-act plays, now in print, and popular with amateur groups include: "LONESOME LIKE," "THE DOORWAY," "THE PRICE OF COAL," "SPRING IN BLOOMSBURY," "ONCE A HERO," "FOLLOWERS," "CONVERTS," "MAID OF FRANCE," "THE HAPPY HANGMAN," "THE APPLE TREE," etc. Mr. Brighthouse is also the author of several successful novels; and critical articles by him constantly appear in current periodicals.

"LITTLE RED SHOES" is an admirable and significant example of Mr. Brighthouse's work. This comedy of sentiment is laid in a factory town of the English Midlands and introduces the character types he so successfully reveals.

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PERSONS REPRESENTED

TOM SPINK, *an engineer.*

MARY SPINK, *his wife.*

JANEY SPINK, *their daughter.*

PETER MARRABLE, *an old man.*

ROBERT BENNETT, *a shopkeeper.*

SCENE. Interior of Tom's cottage.

First produced by Miss Marie Tempest at the Prince of Wales Theatre, London, on May 20th, 1912, with the following cast :

TOM SPINK	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Reginald Besant</i>
MARY SPINK	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Lilian Christine</i>
JANEY SPINK	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Bessie Courtney</i>
PETER MARRABLE	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Horton Cooper</i>
ROBERT BENNETT	-	-	-	-	-	<i>John Alexander</i>

The play produced by Mr. Graham Browne.

Little Red Shoes

The scene is the living-room of a workman's cottage. Door C. direct to street. Door L. Fireplace R. Window next the street door. Dresser between street door and left wall. Table covered with white cloth, C. On the table the remains of breakfast for three people. Three plain chairs at the table, a chintz upholstered armchair by the fire. Kettle on the fire. Brightly patterned linoleum on the floor. The room is comfortable enough, clean and bright. A man's cap and overcoat hang by the dresser.

(TOM SPINK, a working engineer, still sits at table. He is thirty-four, stolid, obstinate, with a heavy moustache, blue overalls, clean since it is 8 A. M. on a Monday morning, celluloid collar and bright tie. MARY SPINK, his wife, in a cloth skirt, print blouse and apron, inclines to matronliness. Her face is shrewd and kindly. As the curtain rises, she is busily removing pots, etc., on to a lacquered tray. TOM stretches himself with arms upraised. Then he grunts and rises, going to the hanging overcoat and putting it on.)

TOM. Well, I've got the Monday feeling pretty strong, but I suppose I must be getting on.

MARY *(looking at the cheap clock which points to 8.15)*. No hurry yet, Tom. Monday's the only working day of the week when I have you here to breakfast and you don't need to cut it short.

TOM. I've finished. Where's the old 'un? Gone out to draw his pension?

(He stands near the fire, finds a plug of thick twist in his overcoat pocket, a penknife in his trousers and proceeds to cut up the twist.)

MARY. You must think he's an early bird. Pension worm 'ull keep till he's ready to get it.

TOM. Where is he, then?

MARY. He's not up yet.

TOM. Not up? Well, he'll not find much to eat when he comes. *(Surveying table.)* We've made a clearance.

MARY. I'll find him something.

TOM *(arresting his cutting)*. What! Cook it special for him?

MARY. No. He won't let me. Says he likes it best cold.

TOM. And brew fresh tea?

MARY. Of course. The kettle's on now.

TOM. Well, I do call that too bad of him. If we take the old chap in, it's about the least he can do to keep same time as the rest for his meals.

MARY. Get along with your bother. It's no trouble, Tom. I don't mind it.

TOM. Well, I mind it for you. You've enough of work with me and Janey without making another breakfast for a lazy lie-a-bed of his sort.

MARY. He's old and weary, Tom. I'd be for ever hearing my mother that's dead these twenty year call shame on me if I were above putting myself out a bit for her own brother.

TOM *(sharply)*. You do put yourself out, then. Minute ago you said it wasn't no trouble.

MARY. Nothing to speak on. It's a pleasure to do for him. He's that grateful.

TOM. He'd best be grateful, too. It was this or the workhouse for him when he came a month ago and I'm beginning to think the house 'ud have been best if he's a worry to you. He'd be looked after there.

MARY. He doesn't worry me, Tom.

TOM. I said we'd try it for a month. Month's up, Mary.

MARY (*in alarm*). You wouldn't turn him out!

TOM (*by this time his pipe is filled. He lights up*). I don't know.

MARY (*pleadingly*). My own mother's eldest brother and I'm the only kin he has.

TOM. He'd not have stayed on here if he'd been less. I don't like lodgers.

MARY (*reproachfully*). I'm sure you haven't known he was there. He's that quiet.

TOM. Haven't I! Every minute.

MARY. You'll tell me next I've neglected you for him.

TOM. No and I'll not for it isn't true. But I can't get used to sight of him sitting here by my fire. Makes me feel somehow as if my house wasn't my own. I'm in two minds over letting him stay and that's a fact.

MARY. He's harmless enough, I'm sure.

TOM. He's a bit cracked and you never know. I'm frit to death with thinking what he's up to when he's out.

MARY. He's not out much and he brings me his five shillings every week. Never keeps back so much as a penny for a pinch of snuff or a screw of bacca.

TOM. We don't want the money, Mary. I only let you take it from him as a matter of principle.

MARY (*shrewdly*). It's a principle that pays the rent, Tom.

TOM (*sullenly*). I can pay the rent without his help.

MARY. And he doesn't cost the half of it in food. It's a marvel to me the little he eats.

TOM. Well, he should eat at proper hours. They'd make him shape different if he'd to go to the workhouse.

MARY. He mustn't do that, Tom. You can't see your own flesh and blood go there while you've a roof to cover 'em. 'Twouldn't be natural.

TOM. I'm not saying he goes for to make a nuisance of himself. It's just the feeling that he's there all the time.

MARY. I'd never think well of myself if I let him go from here. It's not the workhouse, Tom. He's no need to

go there. There's a many 'ud take him in for the sake of the pension and rob him and break his heart with treating him bad. Let him stay, Tom. When all's said, five shillings is five shillings.

TOM (*looking at clock*). It's time I went.

MARY. Won't you say Yes before you go?

TOM (*graciously*). I'll give him a try for another week and tell you at the end of it.

MARY. Well, I'll trust you. You never were a hard 'un. (*Crossing to door L.*)

TOM. No, but I always liked to feel my house was my own.

MARY (*opening door*). Janey! Haven't you got your things on yet? You can go out with your father if you're ready.

(JANEY, a child of eleven, enters. She has on her thick winter coat, stout home knitted stockings, and hat. Her shoes are conspicuously battered.)

JANEY. I'm ready, mother.

MARY (*straightening her hat*). Let me see you.

TOM (*going to door c., holding his hand out to JANEY*). Come along if you're coming. You'll make me late.

MARY (*severely*). Didn't I tell you to put your new shoes on?

JANEY. I don't like my new shoes. They hurt me.

MARY. You're a naughty girl. Those aren't fit to wear, this weather. Go and change them at once.

TOM. Well, I can't wait. I'll be docked of half a day if I don't get quick. Give your dad a kiss.

(JANEY goes to him. He kisses her, then goes out.

MARY holds the door open, watching him, then closes it.)

MARY (*returning*). Was your Uncle Peter stirring, Janey?

JANEY. Yes, mother, I heard him.

MARY. Well, go and bring your new shoes here now and change them where I can see you. (JANEY goes off L., reluctantly. MARY goes to fireplace and makes tea,

leaving the teapot on the hob. She lifts cup and saucer from dresser to table and puts out a plate with a small piece of cold bacon, bread, etc. JANEY returns with the shoes in one hand, the other in PETER MARRABLE'S. PETER is a bowed old man of seventy, toil worn, heavily wrinkled, white haired, dressed in a rough khaki costume suit with heavy boots. His dark cotton shirt protrudes at the wrists from the wrinkled arms of his coat. He wears a scarf and no collar.) Good-morning, uncle! Feeling well to-day?

PETER. Nicely, nicely.

MARY (*drawing out the chair nearest fire*). Sit you down. (*PETER sits slowly.*) Ready for your breakfast?

PETER. I'm not keen set. Eating don't come as natural as it used.

MARY (*temptingly*). A bit of bacon?

PETER. Aye. Cold bacon's good nourishing food.

MARY. I wish you'd take it hot. It 'ud do you more good.

PETER. I'm used to t'other way. I never was a delicate feeder, not even when I'd my full wage. Eighteen shillings a week old Farmer Dowson give me them days. It was his son reduced me to twelve.

MARY (*bringing teapot from hob and pouring*). Shame on him.

PETER (*in mild protest*). Nay, Mary, it was kindly meant of him to keep me on at all, and me my age and past the work. I weren't no use to him except for cleaning pigs out and light jobs of that sort.

MARY. Get a drink of tea, uncle.

PETER (*pouring from cup into saucer and drinking from saucer*). Ah! That's better. Ah!

(MARY turns to JANEY.)

MARY. Now, Janey! Have you changed your shoes?

JANEY (*who hasn't*). Can't I keep the old ones on for to-day, mother?

MARY. No, you can't. The wet 'ull come straight through those.

JANEY. Just for this morning, then. I'll change at

dinner time. The new ones did hurt me at Sunday School yesterday.

MARY. You'll have me nursing you for the pneumony or something fine if you don't do what I tell you. Take 'em off now.

JANEY (*sulkily*). Yes, mother.

(*Sitting in the armchair, takes off her shoes.*)

PETER. What's to do with the little maid?

MARY. She doesn't like her new shoes.

PETER. Not like her new shoes! Come, that's fractious.

JANEY. They hurt me, Uncle Peter.

MARY. It'll soon wear off. New shoes always pinch, at first.

JANEY. Do your new shoes pinch you, Uncle Peter?

PETER (*chuckling*). My new shoes! Nay, I'll never have no more new shoes, Janey.

JANEY. Won't you? Why not?

PETER (*sticking out a boot and admiring it*). I reckon this old pair of boots 'ull last my time. Grand bit of leather they are. 'Twas young Timothy Maxwell made 'em for me—not so young either, isn't Timothy, come to think of it—but he used good stuff. Not like them fancy light articles the young farm hands goes in nowadays. Bit of good old-fashioned work about these. Cost me a week's wages, I mind.

JANEY. They don't look pretty, Uncle Peter.

PETER. Look! Gosh, child, folks don't buy boots for the looks of 'em. Boots is for keeping wet out and saving your rheumatics.

JANEY (*struggling with a shoe*). I can't get it on, mother.

MARY. Nonsense! You got it on all right yesterday. There! Let me.

(*She tries at first unsuccessfully, reaches to the table for a spoon, uses it as a shoehorn and gets the shoes on.*)

PETER (*while MARY operates, still admiring his boots*). They'd fetch a price still, would those boots.

JANEY (*standing*). They *are* stiff and they don't look a bit nice.

PETER (*transferring his gaze to JANEY's feet*). They're a beautiful pair.

JANEY. Not half so nice as the shoes in the shop, Uncle Peter.

MARY (*returning the spoon to table*). Yes. Would you believe it? When I got her in the shop to buy her these for a birthday gift on Saturday night, nothing 'ud suit my fine lady but a pair of fancy red shoes that were hanging up in the doorway.

PETER. Red shoes! Ho, ho!

JANEY. They were soft. And it was my birthday.

MARY. Soft and second-hand. Someone's cast offs. Bennett does a trade that way.

JANEY. I ought to have had what I wanted 'cos it was my birthday. Do you have what you like when it's your birthday, Uncle Peter?

PETER (*shaking his head, then struck with a thought, nodding*). I had, this year. Five shillings a week for life is what I had for a birthday gift this time, Janey. Very near lost count of birthdays, I had. It's a hard job to remember when there's been so many of 'em.

JANEY. And did you always get what you wanted every time you had a birthday?

PETER. More kicks than ha'pence, maidie. I'm getting the ha'pence now to make up for the kicks.

MARY (*looking at clock*). Now, Janey, it's time you were off. You'll be late for school.

PETER (*rising*). I'm going for my birthday gift, Janey. Take me with you as far as the post-office.

JANEY. I wish they'd give you red shoes instead of silly money. Then you could give them me.

MARY. You're a vain thing, Janey. Workaday folk don't wear red shoes.

(PETER *puts on a wide soft hat from beside the dresser.*)

JANEY. They wouldn't pinch my heels like these.

MARY. Get along with your worrit. Now, uncle, are you going out like that?

PETER. Like what?

MARY. Tom put on his overcoat. It's a cold day.

PETER. I never had no greatcoat. Your man be like they young farm hands to yonder. Tender in his feelings.

MARY. Well, don't be gone long.

PETER. I'll happen take a stroll along the High Street to look at shops. (*Turning towards fireplace.*) I mustn't forget my book.

MARY (*anticipating him and handing his pension book from the corner of the mantelpiece*). There you are.

PETER. Thankee. Come along, Janey.

MARY. Be a good girl, Janey, and don't make teacher cross with you. (*Kissing her. Exeunt C. PETER and JANEX. MARY closes the door and busies herself about the room; removes the used crockery to tray and carries it out L., returns with long handled brush, removes tablecloth, folds it into a drawer of the dresser. Takes up hearthrug and carries it to door C.; opens door and shakes rug. As she finishes she looks down the road, starts, replaces rug hastily and returns to the open door as TOM enters. MARY, anxiously.*) Eh, Tom, whatever's brought you back? Are you sick?

TOM (*closing door*). Sick? No.

MARY. What's to do?

TOM (*taking off his overcoat*). What do you think? No work. That's what's the matter.

MARY. Short time?

TOM. Three days a week.

MARY. Will it last?

TOM. Might last this way through the winter if all they say's true. Three days a week and start after breakfast at that, to save lighting for the masters. (*Bitterly.*) You'll not make so blooming much fuss about having me here for breakfast before we're through with this.

MARY. Don't take it badly, Tom. Half time's better than none.

TOM (*sitting despondently in the armchair*). It'll be a hard winter. You'll have to pinch and scrape to make ends meet.

MARY (*encouragingly*). I'll manage, Tom. I always do, you know.

TOM. Yes. You're a managing sort and a masterpiece at cooking. I've always said that for you. But it means short commons unless I can do a bit of good with the horses.

MARY (*reprovingly*). Now, Tom! You can't afford to bet on half wages.

TOM (*obstinately*). It's all right. I shan't get bitten. Lots of time for studying before I put it on.

MARY. Don't bet, Tom. You'll not go short of much, I promise you. (*Cheerfully.*) Having uncle here 'ull be a godsend. No need to worry about rent, anyhow, so long as we've his five shillings a week coming in.

TOM. You seem cocksure I'll let him stay.

MARY (*earnestly*). You must, Tom, now. It 'ull be very near the salvation of us.

TOM (*muttering*). I'll not be saved by him.

MARY. It'll make all the difference between going slow and out and out starving.

TOM (*aloud*). I don't like the thought of being beholden to such as him.

MARY. We're not beholden to him, Tom. We took him in without a thought of the money. 'Twas he made us take it.

TOM. And is it worth it to you, Mary?

MARY. I've told you 'tis. It's the rent for certain and he makes no work.

TOM. He makes worry. He's so daft it's a risk to let him out. You never know what he might do.

MARY. He's as harmless as a child. Who wouldn't be simple at seventy with the hard life he's had? Think shame to yourself, Tom Spink. Think shame for dreaming of letting him go where he'd be unhappy.

TOM (*rising*). And who'll pay doctor's bills if he falls ill? Is he in a sick club? No, and couldn't get in at his age, either. It's foolishness to talk as if you'd have his five shillings clear forever. Now I've had it all out with myself going to the shop and I made up my mind I'd flit him at the week-end.

MARY. Aye. That was before you knew you'd gone on short time.

TOM. It makes no difference. He's more trouble than he's worth.

MARY. He doesn't trouble me.

TOM. He troubles me, then. He's a responsibility.

MARY. So's the rent a responsibility. My responsibility.

TOM (*dogmatically*). Now it's no use of you arguing with me, Mary. I wear the trousers in this house. I've told you he's to go and that's the end of it.

(*The center door opens and PETER enters. He is tired but seems very pleased with himself.*)

MARY. Back, uncle? (*She closes the door.*)

PETER. Yes, Mary. I'm not the man I was. I soon get tired.

TOM (*putting the armchair nearer the fire*). Sit you down.

PETER. Why, Tom man, you're to home early.

TOM (*surlily*). Yes. I'm home early.

PETER (*sitting gently*). Something wrong?

TOM. Work's slack. We're on three days a week.

PETER. Three days a week! Never hear tell of that in the country. Work there for every day. Plenty for winter and too much for summer.

TOM. Pity you ever left it, then. (*Offensively.*)

PETER (*with philosophy*). Aye, aye. Work's a pleasure when you're strong.

TOM. We all find that out when we've none to do.

MARY. You've done your share, Uncle Peter.

PETER (*chuckling*). He, he. I'm getting a bit of my own back now, though—eh—Mary? (*Punctuating the last words by taking two half crowns one by one from his waistcoat pocket and putting them side by side on the table which he can just reach without rising.*) There you are, lass. There's your 'lowance from your old uncle.

MARY. Won't you keep any for yourself, uncle?

PETER. No, lass, no. You give me all as I want. My old insides don't crave for extr'y rations now like as they

did when I labored. Couldn't stuff 'em full enough one time.

TOM. Nor bacca, sir?

PETER. I give that up when the young master reduced my wage. I'm that way now I couldn't stomach bacca.

MARY. You would keep some back if there was anything you fancied, uncle?

PETER (*chuckling*). I got something for nothing this morning.

MARY. No, you didn't. Pensions aren't something for nothing. They're back pay coming to you. You earned that when you were young and strong and it's been kept warm for you till now.

PETER (*who has shown irritation while she speaks*). Something for nothing, I tell you. Got 'em in my pocket now.

TOM (*to MARY*). What does he mean?

MARY. I don't know.

PETER (*after a struggle in his pocket, producing a pair of small red shoes*). There! Them's what the little maid wanted, aren't they?

MARY (*looking*). The shoes!

TOM. What are they?

MARY. Janey wanted them.

PETER. Yes. They're her birthday gift from her uncle.

MARY. But —

(*Bending over table and looking at the half crowns.*)

TOM. Yes.

MARY. They're not two shilling bits.

(*Meeting TOM's eye.*)

PETER (*chuckling*). Put 'em there to your hand. Hanging outside shop. Only got to hook 'em off and slip 'em in your pocket.

(*TOM bends over for the shoes. MARY catches his hand.*)

MARY. Don't touch them, Tom. They're not ours.

PETER. Yes, they are. I give 'em Janey for a birthday gift.

MARY. What must we do, Tom?

TOM. I don't know. I was feared he'd break his leg, and it's the law he's broken.

(ROBERT BENNETT *opens the door c. quickly and enters. He is a stumpy man with hair standing up stiffly, hard face with moustache, dirty hands, wearing a bowler hat and a black apron under his coat. His manner varies from the small shopman's cringe to a customer, to his truculence to an errand boy. As he enters, truculence is uppermost. He sees the shoes on the table and pounces forward with something like a snarl.*)

BENNETT. Ah! There they are, staring me in the face!

TOM. Who's this?

BENNETT. What are those shoes doing there?

PETER (*putting his hand out to cover them*). They're mine. You shan't take 'em away.

BENNETT (*snatching them up*). Yours, are they? You old thief!

(*Putting the shoes on the edge of the table remote from PETER.*)

MARY. Thief! Be careful.

BENNETT. Saw him with my own eyes, missus. Never watched anything so barefaced in my life. Looked up and down the street, found no one about—slack time of the morning—slipped these shoes into his pocket and off before I could turn round. I got into my coat and followed. Kept my eye on him till he came in here.

PETER. You've got a many others, master. You'll never feel the loss of 'em. And the little maid wanted 'em so bad.

BENNETT. What little maid?

MARY. Don't you know me, Mr. Bennett?

BENNETT (*with a lapse into his cringe*). Why, if it

isn't Mrs. Spink! You were in my shop on Saturday night.

MARY. And many a Saturday night before it. I'm a good customer of yours.

TOM. What are you going to do?

BENNETT. Does he belong here?

(He asks TOM, who doesn't answer.)

MARY. Yes.

PETER *(putting his hand out, all the time unable to keep his eyes off the shoes)*. Give 'em to me, master. I didn't go for to steal them. Only, Janey wanted them and it's been her birthday. I never stole nothing before.

BENNETT. That's an old tale. I've often missed things and they all say that.

PETER. It looked so easy just to slip those tiny things into my pocket. Must have done it wrong, though. Maybe I'm too old to start stealing proper. I didn't know folks were so sharp at noticing.

BENNETT. I've got eyes in the back of my head. Have to round this neighborhood. Well, Mrs. Spink, I'm sorry he's one of yours. Couldn't put it plainer than he did, could he? That's a confession of theft. I'll have to inform the police.

PETER. Don't do that, mister.

BENNETT. It's my duty to society. Honest folk must be protected.

MARY. Don't you see he's a bit simple, sir? He didn't go for to do it.

TOM. Take the shoes back with you and say nothing about it.

PETER. You shan't take them away. They're Janey's. Janey wants them.

BENNETT. They'll decide in the police court if he's simple. He's going to be locked up. Prison or asylum—I don't care which—out of the road, either way.

PETER. Don't do it, master. I'll lose my pension if you do that.

BENNETT. Pension? Old soldier?

MARY. No. Old age pensioner.

BENNETT (*nodding disgustedly*). And I'm taxed to pay for that. For him to draw five shillings a week for nothing except being over seventy. And that's his gratitude. Coming and pinching shoes when he thinks my back's turned. It's hard enough for an independent man to make an honest living against these big companies. And a new shop opened very near alongside me, never mind putting up taxes to pay out in pensions. There's this about it, they'll have one pension the less to tax me for now.

MARY. I've been a good customer to you, Mr. Bennett. Always bought at your shop for all of us.

BENNETT. That's not the point.

MARY. He meant no harm.

BENNETT. He meant thieving.

(Tom holds himself aloof.)

MARY. No, he didn't. He didn't know what he was doing. Don't prosecute. He's so simple. You'll never get them to convict.

BENNETT. I'll chance that.

MARY. You'll lose a lot of trade for it, then.

BENNETT. Lose trade for doing my duty as a citizen and protecting society against the likes of him? Not likely.

MARY (*with arms akimbo*). You'll lose every bit of trade you do in this street. I'll see to that.

BENNETT. I'd advise you to be careful what you're saying. That's blackmail.

MARY. It's fact so whatever else it is. Do you think it 'ull pay you to be unpopular with that new boot shop as you spoke of pushing their way nicely?

BENNETT (*visibly moved by this argument—whining*). I've got my living to make. I can't go condoning theft or I'd be bankrupt in a week.

MARY. Your trade's worth more to you than the price of a second-hand pair of fancy shoes.

TOM (*coming to MARY's aid with reluctance*). Yes. As man to man is there no way of arranging this friendly?

PETER. I'm being a sad trouble to you, Tom. Best let him take me. I'll be out of your way then.

BENNETT. Thieves should be punished.

MARY. You've a taste for hard words.

BENNETT. I call a spade a spade. (*After a slight pause.*) Fifteen shillings is the price of these shoes.

TOM. Fifteen shillings!

BENNETT. Fifteen shillings.

MARY. They're marked three shillings inside.

BENNETT. How do you know?

MARY. I looked at 'em on Saturday night when I bought t'others. The child wanted these, so I looked to see.

PETER. Aye. Janey wanted these.

TOM. Price has gone up a bit over the week-end.

BENNETT. That's the price to you.

MARY. Three shillings for the shoes and the rest hush money.

BENNETT. Hush money!

MARY. I'm calling a spade a spade.

BENNETT. I'm entitled to a profit. It's compensation for going against my conscience.

MARY. It's robbery.

BENNETT. He's the robber. Fifteen shillings. Not a penny less.

MARY. Tom ——

(*TOM shakes his head.*)

PETER. No. I'm not worth spending money on. It's got to be what he says.

BENNETT (*looking at TOM*). I suppose you're hanging round because you're out of work.

TOM. As good as.

MARY. I haven't got the money, Mr. Bennett.

PETER. Don't think of it, Mary.

MARY (*looking timidly at TOM*). If you'll wait, sir, I'll see if I can put something away and get it.

PETER. No. (*Rising.*) This is between me and you.

(*To BENNETT.*)

BENNETT. Are you going to pay?

PETER. I've got no money. I'd have paid you if I had.

BENNETT. You've your pension. What's that on the table?

PETER. That goes to her.

MARY. Yes. With that and — (*Looking at the clock.*) I'll soon make it up.

BENNETT. You'll have to be sharp, now. I can't be away all morning from my shop.

PETER (*getting in MARY's path*). No.

TOM. Leave that clock alone, Mary. I won't have it going to the pawnshop.

PETER (*to BENNETT*). Mister, do you see my boots?

BENNETT. Yes.

PETER. Will you take them in exchange?

BENNETT (*contemptuously*). They're not town boots.

PETER (*sitting again and beginning to unlace a boot*). Better than town boots. Sound leather. Hand-made in the country.

MARY. You can't go out without your boots.

PETER. I can stay in if (*Looking at TOM.*) you'll give house room to a thief.

BENNETT. Let me see. It 'ud stop you strolling round for what you can pick up.

PETER. Yes. It'll stop me going out. I'll never get another pair of boots. (*Still fumbling with the laces.*)

BENNETT. Quick now!

TOM. And what about your pension? Will that walk to you?

PETER. I can go barefoot for that.

MARY. It'll be the death of you.

PETER. It's maybe time for an old man to be looking for his grave when he's forgot the difference 'twixt right and wrong. (*Standing and passing the boot to BENNETT, who examines it. PETER's thick grey sock is much darned with darker wool.*) You'll take my beautiful boots, sir, and the little maid can have her red shoes now.

BENNETT. Do you call these —?

(*TOM comes forward, snatches the boot and gives it to PETER.*)

TOM. Put that boot on.

BENNETT. What the devil do you mean?

TOM (*counting silver out of his pocket*). There's your fifteen shillings and there's the door.

BENNETT (*taking it*). Got it all the time, had you? Lucky for him. I wouldn't have had those boots as a gift.

TOM. Get out.

[*Exit BENNETT.*]

PETER. You shouldn't have done it, Tom. I'm not worth it.

TOM. You shut up. Do you think I'd let you pay for Janey's shoes with your life?

MARY. Tom! And —— (*Looking at PETER.*)

TOM. Oh, aye. He's a stayer now. And there'll be no horse betting, lass. I've somehow lost the brass I'd put aside for that.

PETER. I'll try not to be a burden to you, Tom. I wouldn't have done it only the little maid did want them shoes so bad.

(*Tom shakes his hand.*)

CURTAIN

TIE GAME

A Play

By

LLOYD FRANK THANHOUSER

Mr. Thanhouser was born in Milwaukee, Wis., January 31st, 1902. In 1909 his family came east and his father, Edwin Thanhouser, entered into the manufacturing of motion pictures, being the first well known legitimate stage producer to take the step. Mrs. Thanhouser was fascinated by the possibilities of the screen and wrote some of the first "movie scenarios" (terms not yet coined at the time) in motion picture history. The boy could not help being interested in things theatrical: plots, characters, and situations were table talk almost as far back as he can remember. He had two years of schooling in Lausanne, Switzerland, before the war, and prepared for college at Culver Military Academy, where he edited the school paper and annual. Entering Yale in 1919, he received his Ph. B. degree in due course. During his Junior and Senior years he studied Contemporary drama and play construction under Professors William Lyon Phelps and Jack Crawford, and wrote several plays for the "Yale Playcraftsmen," a student Little Theatre organization which he was instrumental in starting. Thanhouser continued his course at Yale in the Law School, writing occasional other plays for the Playcraftsmen, the last one being "Tie Game." The idea for this piece was found in a cartoon in "Life" some years ago, depicting two men crossing swords. Beneath, a caption read: "Picture of a doctor and a lawyer trying to get professional advice from one another." One of Thanhouser's plays, "Trash," was awarded a prize for the best play by a Yale undergraduate, and another, "The Biddie Sweeps Out," which deals with college life, created quite a storm of comment about the campus. Under the title of "Yale Playcraftsmen Plays" The Walter H. Baker Company have published four of his one-act plays: "The End of the Rope," "The Man Without a Head," "Trash," "The Biddie Sweeps Out."

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CHARACTERS

"LYDIE."

DR. MCINTIRE.

"JUDGE" TOM WINFIELD.

SCENE

The parlor of "Judge" Tom Winfield's home in a small New England village: a homely, old-fashioned room that has been lived in continuously for many years. A doorway, back center, leads to the hall and street door. A window in the left wall; a fireplace in the right. The furniture includes a sofa, a patent overstuffed rocker, two straight-backed chairs, and a marble-topped, black walnut table. A coal-oil lamp, a tobacco jar, and a checker-board rest upon the table.

The room is pervaded by an air of masculine sloppiness, which has been counteracted but slightly by feminine hands.

TIME. A winter's evening; the present.

TIE GAME

SCENE.—*At rise of curtain the lamp on the table casts its yellow light about the room and a cheery fire glows in the fireplace. The window shade is drawn.*

(LYDIE is discovered, using the rocker for its intended purpose. She is dumpy, bovine, sentimental, and fifty. As she rocks she knits, and as she knits she hums a dismal song to herself that has neither beginning nor end. She does all these things in unison with a peculiar rhythmic monotony, inspired, no doubt, by the tune. Finally she looks up at the clock on the mantel. She gives a little gasp of surprise, rises, crosses to the window, and peeps out. She returns to her chair and takes up her knitting and her song where she left off. After a few moments the door-bell jangles and LYDIE jumps to her feet again.)

LYDIE. Well, it's about time! (She crosses to the hall doorway and soon reënters, followed by DR. MCINTIRE. He is a wizened little man of sixty, wearing a heavy overcoat, a fur cap with ear-laps, and mittens. A pair of gold-rimmed spectacles are perched dangerously near the tip of his high Scotch nose, so that he must look over, rather than through them. The sharpness of his features is exceeded only by the sharpness of his tongue.) Oh, so it's you, Dr. McIntire.

DOCTOR (testily). Of course it's me.

LYDIE. Well, come over by the fire, why don't you? (DOCTOR crosses to fireplace.) It's awful cold out, ain't it?

DOCTOR. Yep. Good weather for grippe and influenza. (*Rubs his hands together.*) Busy days for me!

LYDIE. I wasn't expectin' to see you so soon after the way you and the Judge carried on night 'fore last.

DOCTOR. No, and I wouldn't o' come at all if I didn't want to see Tom on something special.

LYDIE. Well, the Judge ain't back yet.

DOCTOR. He ain't?

LYDIE. No. He went up to Norrington to defend that young I-talian fellah what killed a man.

DOCTOR. Oh, yes. . . . Guess they'll hang him, all right.

LYDIE. Ain't it a shame! And him such a young fellah, and so handsome—like Rudolph Valentino. Don't you think maybe they'll let him off?

DOCTOR. Well, Tom ain't been winnin' many cases lately.

LYDIE. 'Tain't his fault. He's just been on the wrong side, that's all.

DOCTOR. Oh, Tom ain't a bad lawyer—as lawyers go—but he's not makin' much money these days. He don't charge enough. I'll bet he don't get more'n ten dollars for losing this case and sending the poor Italian fellah to the gallows.

LYDIE. Yes, the Judge is big-hearted that way.

DOCTOR. Don't see how he can stand it. Here he is as old as I am, and he hasn't got a cent laid by—not a cent. Just one thing *I'm* afraid of, and that's bein' poor when I'm old.

LYDIE. But the Judge ain't old, and besides he's so big and strong. Why, he don't even mind bein' out on a night like this.

DOCTOR. Yes, if everybody was as healthy as Tom is, I'd have to give up doctorin' and do something easy, like being a lawyer. . . . When do you expect him back?

LYDIE. He's late now. Take off your coat, why don't you, and when he comes in you can play some checkers with him.

DOCTOR (*angrily*). Nup! I'll never play with him again after the way he acted night 'fore last!

LYDIE. Aw, you'll have a game with him, won't you? Last night it was awful lonesome. I had to play with him, but he didn't enjoy it—he always beat me.

DOCTOR. Yes, and when I beat him five games in a row, what did he do? Threw the checker-board onto the floor, and kicked the checkers all over the room!

LYDIE. That was only 'cause he can't abide to have you beat him. He's touchy that way.

DOCTOR. Yes, the old fool. . . . But I was thinkin' o' bein' on speakin' terms with him again, anyhow. (*Magnanimously.*) I'm willing he should apologize.

LYDIE. Oh, you know he'd never do that.

DOCTOR. Well, maybe I'll have to 'pologize myself, then. Fact is, I want to see Tom on something special. You see, I'm thinkin' o' makin' my will.

LYDIE. Y' don't say.

DOCTOR. Yep. I've worked hard all my life and saved my money. Now I've got it all invested so I can live off it, if I have to, and so when I die I can leave it to a friend o' mine that needs it. (*Mysteriously.*) Do you want to see something?

LYDIE (*all curiosity*). Why, o' course I do!

DOCTOR (*reverently and proudly taking a bundle of papers from his pocket*). Well, look! Here's some of the finest bonds on the market. I bought 'em cheap, and they bring eight per cent.!

LYDIE. Do they, now? You wouldn't think so, just lookin' at 'em. Ain't they pretty! . . . Oh, what's that paper there?

DOCTOR. You won't tell Tom when he comes in? Promise?

LYDIE. Uh-huh.

DOCTOR. Well, that's my will. I've got it all written out, but I'm afraid it ain't legal, and all like that, and I thought maybe Tom would look over these bonds and make my will up proper, seein' as how we been friends more'n fifty years—off and on.

LYDIE. The Judge'll be havin' office hours in the morning. You could see him then.

DOCTOR. Yes, and have him send me a bill on the first o' the month for "services rendered," just for putting a lot of "to wits" and "herebys" and fool Latin words like that into my will!

LYDIE. But that's what lawyers gets paid for.

DOCTOR. Sure, for nothing. They're a bad bunch!

LYDIE. Oh, but the Judge . . .

DOCTOR (*cutting in*). He's as bad as the rest of 'em, the old fool! (*Craftily*.) But I was thinkin' if I let him win a few games of checkers and 'pologized to him 'cause it was his fault the other night, why, maybe he'd do what I want without chargin' me.

LYDIE. I don't think he'd do it. It ain't easy to trick the Judge, that way.

DOCTOR. It ain't? I always get the best o' him—always could. You watch! (*He puts on his mittens, preparatory to leaving*.) Well, I got to run along, now. Mind, you promised not to tell Tom about the will. I'll show you how easy it is to trick him! You won't tell him, will you?

LYDIE. Yes—I—I mean no. . . . Will you be back soon?

DOCTOR. Yep. Just got to run over across the way to see Mrs. Wiggins. She's had another, you know—a boy this time. (*Starts to exit*.)

LYDIA. Another! Well! That's ten, ain't it?

DOCTOR. Eleven.

(*He exits, and the street door is heard to close behind him. LYDIE remains transfixed for a moment, smiling dreamily.*)

LYDIE. Eleven! . . . (*She sighs deeply.*) Lucky woman! . . . (*Her reveries pass away, and she bustles about the room, humming her endless song to herself as she tidies up. She stops on hearing someone enter the house and crosses to hall doorway as "JUDGE" TOM WINFIELD appears. He is a ponderous man whose mind, and hence whose speech, moves slowly. He wears a broad-brimmed black hat and a tremendous overcoat. He carries a brief case.*) Oh, Judge, I was gettin' kind

o' worried about you, out late like this, and it's so cold.

(*The JUDGE lays his brief case on the table and LYDIE helps him off with his things.*)

JUDGE. Yes, it's very cold out—rotten weather. (*LYDIE exits to hall with his coat and hat, and he crosses to fireplace.*) Anybody been to see me?

LYDIE (*from hall*). Nobody, 'cept just Dr. McIntire.

JUDGE (*with stentorian anger*). What? Is that little scalawag hanging around here again? It's just like him. You can't insult him, no sir! (*Reënter LYDIE.*) What did he want?

LYDIE (*evasively*). Oh, he just sort o' came in, like.

JUDGE. Wanted a game, I suppose. Well, I won't play with him and listen to him crow every time he wins.

LYDIE. Maybe he'll let *you* win.

JUDGE. *Let me win!* Well, I like that. I could beat him every time to-night—if I hadn't had such a bad day.

LYDIE. You didn't lose the case, did you?

JUDGE. Lose the case? No. It was lost before I started on it.

LYDIE. Aw!

JUDGE (*shuddering*). He'll be hanged by the neck until dead.

LYDIE. Aw, ain't it a shame! And him so young, and . . .

JUDGE (*interrupting*). Don't let's talk about it. I've seen men sentenced before, but I'm getting old and soft-hearted, I guess. It made me afraid. . . . I don't like to think of death—at my age.

LYDIE. But you ain't old.

JUDGE. I don't know what it is. I've been this way for a long time, now—afraid I'll die.

LYDIE. You musn't think o' things like that, Judge. It—it's so awful, sort of—and bad luck. But you *ain't* lookin' at all well. You ought to have the doctor 'xamine you, and . . .

JUDGE (*breaking in*). Doctor? Never went to one in my life. I'm too healthy to have them make any money

off of me. (*Puffing his huge chest.*) I'm not a sawed-off little weakling, like Mac.

LYDIE. He's coming back pretty soon. He's just over to Mrs. Wiggins'. Maybe if he gave you some pills, or something . . .

JUDGE. Pills! I wouldn't go to the doctor, I tell you—old pill-slinger. And have him send me a bill just for making me stick out my tongue and say "Ah"? No, sir! I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of poking around me.

LYDIE. Well, he was thinking o' coming to see *you* on business. . . . Oh, I shouldn't o' said that!

JUDGE. Said what?

LYDIE. That—that he wants you should make out his will.

JUDGE. Why shouldn't you say that?

LYDIE. Cau—cause I promised. You see, he wants you should make it out free.

JUDGE. He does, does he!

LYDIE. Well, it's out now, so I might as well tell you. He's going to act like he's sorry about night 'fore last, and let you win at checkers, and when you're feelin' good, then he's going to ask you.

JUDGE (*with rising anger*). Well, the little skinflint!

LYDIE. Oh, I shouldn't o' told you!

JUDGE. I ought to break his neck. I used to lick him once a day, regular, when we were boys, just for the exercise.

LYDIE. Oh, don't do that! He thought because you're so good-natured you'd . . .

JUDGE (*indignantly seizing on the thought*). That's it! He wants to take advantage of my good nature. Me, his best friend! The richest man around here, and he wants me to make his will out free! Well, I guess not!

LYDIE. He's got the will all writ out. He only wants you should make it legal-like. He thought he could trick you, 'cause . . .

JUDGE. He wants to trick me, eh? The little worm! Humph! The idea, imposing on my good nature!

Humm. . . . (*He thinks deeply for a minute. Then, as an idea dawns on him.*) I don't think he'll trick me this time. But I'll trick him! Yes, sir! I'll teach him! You want me to see the doctor. Well, I'll see him, and I'll make him examine me for nothing! (*He laughs at the thought.*) Why, that 'ud be the biggest joke in the world! (*Expanding his idea.*) When he comes I'll treat him fine, I'll apologize, I'll make it so he can't lose a game of checkers. Yes, sir, I'll feed him his own pill! (*They laugh.*) I'll pretend I'm awful sick; I'll faint, or something.

LYDIE. Oh, don't do that, Judge, that's bad luck.

JUDGE. I'll get the best of the little scalawag this time! I'll teach him! (*The door-bell rings.*) There he is! Go let him in. (*LYDIE exits to hall and the JUDGE paces the floor, chuckling to himself.*) I'll teach him, the little tight-wad!

LYDIE (*voice off-stage*). Yes, he's in, Dr. McIntire.

JUDGE. Hello, Mac! Come right in!

(*DR. MCINTIRE appears in the doorway, blinking at his effusive reception.*)

DOCTOR. Evenin', Tom.

JUDGE. Take off your things and stay a while.

(*He slaps the DOCTOR on the back with more than ordinary gusto. LYDIE helps the DOCTOR off with his things and exits with them to hall.*)

DOCTOR. What's the matter with you, Tom? Y' seem awful glad to see me.

JUDGE. Well, I guess it's because I feel guilty about the other night. I'm sorry I lost my temper. I want to apologize.

(*They shake hands, the JUDGE gripping a bit too hard.*)

DOCTOR (*not to be outdone*). Not at all. It was my fault, anyhow.

JUDGE. No, no. It was all my fault.

DOCTOR (*up in arms*). 'Twasn't. It was mine.

JUDGE (*with an effort at coolness*). Now look here, Mac, I lost my temper, and I'm sorry.

DOCTOR. Didn't I poke fun at you? That's enough to make anybody mad. I was to blame.

JUDGE (*losing control*). Don't contradict me! It was my fault, do you hear, you little scalawag?

DOCTOR. I tell you I was to blame, you big fool—and don't call me a little scalawag!

JUDGE. Well, don't call me a big fool, you little scal . . .

LYDIE (*entering*). Lan' sakes! You two ain't going to start fightin' again just after you made up, are you? You're worse'n a couple o' schoolboys! (*The men look sheepishly at the carpet.*) Y' ought to be ashamed!

JUDGE. I'm sorry, Mac.

DOCTOR. Me, too. (*He is about to offer his hand when he remembers the last hand-shake.*) And besides, I was to blame.

JUDGE (*begins to remonstrate when he sees LYDIE's look of exasperation*). Well, we're friends now, aren't we, Mac?

DOCTOR. Yep.

(*The JUDGE slaps the DOCTOR on the back and winks at LYDIE, who nods with a knowing smile, and withdraws.*)

JUDGE. You know, I'm glad you dropped in. I missed our little game last night.

(*Crosses to table and fills his pipe from tobacco jar.*)

DOCTOR (*taking pipe from pocket*). Me, too. (*Making conversation.*) Well, any news up to Norrington?

JUDGE. Not much. I lost my case.

DOCTOR. Well, I was expectin' that. Didn't get much out of it, did you?

JUDGE. No, but I've got a new case ought to bring me quite a little. Man that sold a lot of bogus bonds around here. I'm acting as special counsel for the State. (*He is about to put the cover back on the tobacco jar when the DOCTOR coughs to call attention to his waiting pipe.*) Oh, have some tobacco, Mac?

DOCTOR. Thanks. I forgot mine. (*He fills his pipe, punctuating his speech with fierce thumb-thrusts at the bowl.*) Don't like the tobacco I've got, anyhow. You can't pack it tight enough for a good smoke.

JUDGE. Well, shall we have a little game?

DOCTOR. Yep.

(*They sit at opposite sides of the table and light their pipes. They arrange the checkers during following.*)

JUDGE. Patients paying up well, Mac?

DOCTOR. Yep. I see to that. I ain't going to be poor when I'm old.

JUDGE. Well, I'm not so young, myself, and I can't seem to save money like you do. Wish I could.

DOCTOR. You move first.

JUDGE. Oh, no. You move first. (*The DOCTOR moves and they play on during following.*) I don't feel very well to-night. Don't think I can beat you.

DOCTOR. Me neither. Y' got to jump.

JUDGE (*jumping*). By the way, Mac, what does it mean when you get sort of weak and dizzy at times?

DOCTOR. Probably that you've been drinking again. Jump! (*JUDGE jumps.*) Huh, guess you have been drinking. You could have jumped three men, 'stead o' one.

JUDGE (*in mock surprise*). Well, well, so I could.

DOCTOR. That ain't like you. Jump!

(*His pipe has gone out. He relights it.*)

JUDGE (*jumping*). Is it a bad sign when you get out of breath easily?

DOCTOR. What's that got to do with checkers, I'd like to know? Jump! (*Silence for a moment.*) You made any wills lately, Tom?

JUDGE. Some. And I got good fees for 'em, too.

DOCTOR. Y' know, Tom, I'm thinkin' o' makin' my will. (*His pipe has gone out again. He relights it.*)

JUDGE. Well, you can't take your pile along with you.

DOCTOR. I'm thinkin' of fixin' up a friend o' mine that

never could save a cent. I think I've got my money pretty safely invested. If I was just sure . . .

JUDGE (*interrupting*). What's *that* got to do with checkers? Jump!

DOCTOR (*jumps. He puffs hard on his pipe and finds it out again*). Dammit! Your tobacco packs too tight! It won't draw.

JUDGE. Well, here. Have a cigar.

(*Takes a cigar from pocket and hands it to DOCTOR.*)

DOCTOR (*sniffing it*). What's the matter with it?

JUDGE. Why, nothing. A friend of mine gave it to me.

DOCTOR. Thanks.

(*He puts the cigar in his pocket and lights his pipe again.*)

JUDGE. It's your move. (*The DOCTOR studies the situation hard; then moves.*) You should have moved there—that would have won the game.

DOCTOR. Hum. Didn't see it. You're playin' much better to-night, Tom.

JUDGE. Well, it looks like this is a tie game. Shall we have another? (*DOCTOR nods assent. They arrange pieces again.*) Funny thing happened to me to-day.

DOCTOR. Umm.

JUDGE. I was late and I ran up the courthouse steps and when I got inside I had to sit down.

DOCTOR. Umm.

JUDGE. I couldn't get my breath and my heart was beating like a trip-hammer. (*The DOCTOR remains silent.*) Getting old, I guess.

DOCTOR. I guess. You start this time. (*The JUDGE moves.*) You know a lot about bonds, don't you, Tom?

JUDGE. Yes. My new case . . .

DOCTOR (*interrupting; anxiously*). Do you know anything about Amalgamated Steel?

JUDGE. What are you aiming at, anyway?

DOCTOR. Oh, nothing—nothing. I've got some, that's all, and I was wondering how they'd be for an invest-

ment, so when I die I could leave 'em to my friend, and . . .

JUDGE (*breaking in*). Well, come around during office hours and we'll talk it over.

DOCTOR (*angrily*). What do you mean by saying that in that tone of voice?

JUDGE. Nothing, Mac. Now remember, we're not going to fight. I'm not feeling well enough for that.

(*Another moment of silence as they play on.*)

DOCTOR. If I was just sure about those bonds, I'd feel easy. I ain't rugged like you are, and the time when I'll have to quit work might come any minute.

JUDGE. Well, I'm not feeling very well these days, myself. Guess I ought to go see a good doctor. My heart . . .

DOCTOR (*exploding*). What do you mean, a good doctor? I'm a good doctor, and I'm your friend.

JUDGE. You're my friend.

DOCTOR (*it went over his head*). Yes, and if you're my friend, you'll look over these bonds for me and tell me if they're all right. (*He takes the bundle of papers from his pocket.*) I bought 'em cheap. And in case I die I want to leave 'em in my will. I got it all made out, you see, but I'm afraid it ain't legal, and all like that. You'll fix it up for me, won't you, Tom? It ain't much work.

JUDGE. Oh, I'm not feeling well enough to do any work now. Oh, oh!

(*The JUDGE feigns sickness. He grabs his head, clutches his heart, and groans.*)

DOCTOR. What's the matter, Tom?

JUDGE. Oh, my head! Oh, oh!

(*He pretends to faint. The DOCTOR crosses to him.*)

DOCTOR. Lydie! Oh, Lydie!

LYDIE (*voice off stage*). Comin'.

DOCTOR. Come quick!

LYDIE (*voice off stage*). Lan' sakes! What's the

matter now? (*Enters; sees JUDGE.*) Oh, the poor Judge! (*Crosses to JUDGE.*)

DOCTOR. He's had a fit. Here, help me with him over to the sofa. (*They half carry, half drag the JUDGE to sofa.*) Steady, now. That's it. He'll be all right in a minute. (*He feels the JUDGE's pulse, and then puts his ear to the prostrate man's heart.*) Hum. He's a sick man. . . . I'll just run over to my house and get my bag. If he comes to while I'm away don't let him get up.

LYDIE. All right, doctor. (*The doctor exits hurriedly.*) Oh, the poor judge!

(*When the door is heard to close behind the DOCTOR, the JUDGE sits up and bursts into laughter.*)

JUDGE. Ho! Ho! I fooled the little skinflint that time! I never laughed so much in my life!

(*He totters to his feet, shaking with laughter.*)

LYDIE. The doctor said you wasn't to get up till he comes back. You're a sick man.

JUDGE (*collapses in chair from effect of LYDIE's naive remark*). This is the biggest joke in the world! I tricked him! A sick man! There's a doctor for you!

LYDIE. Then you was only foolin'?

JUDGE. Fooling? I fed him his own pill! He's coming back and examine me free!

LYDIE. But that ain't fair.

JUDGE. Well, he was going to trick *me*, wasn't he? Look. (*Picks up bundle of papers DOCTOR has left on table.*) He brought all these for me to look over. Wanted to impose on my good nature, that's what. Wanted me to make his will out free. (*Looks idly over papers. Turns his attention to bundle of securities.*) Well say! (*Scrutinizes them carefully.*) Oh, the poor little scalawag!

LYDIE. What's the matter?

JUDGE. He's been tricked by somebody else. He's bought a lot of bogus bonds.

LYDIE. What's them?

JUDGE. Fakes—no good. My new case is prosecuting the man that sold them. They're counterfeits. I've got a whole brief case full of them here.

(Shows LYDIE bonds in his brief case.)

LYDIE. Lan' sakes! You wouldn't think they was boguses. They're so pretty.

JUDGE *(counting the DOCTOR's bonds)*. The poor little tight-wad. He's bought eight of 'em. Well, I guess that don't mean much to him—he's rich.

LYDIE. Are all these bad?

JUDGE. Bad? Why, they aren't worth the paper they're printed on.

LYDIE. Oh, the poor fellah! And he was so proud o' them boguses.

JUDGE. I always said it wasn't worth while saving your money like he does. You only lose it in the end. Maybe it'll teach him a lesson. And I'm going to teach him another when he comes back.

(The DOCTOR is heard returning. The JUDGE crosses to the sofa and pretends sickness again.)

LYDIE. It ain't right.

JUDGE. Sh!

(The DOCTOR enters, out of breath, carrying medical kit. He quickly crosses to JUDGE and draws up chair.)

DOCTOR. All right, Tom. Bring a glass of water, Lydie. *(LYDIE exits. DOCTOR takes a stethoscope from his bag.)* You say you had a hard time getting your breath after you ran up the courthouse steps to-day?

JUDGE *(with feigned weakness)*. Yes. . . . Oh!

DOCTOR. Have you got a pain?

JUDGE. Yes. Here. *(Holds his hand to his heart.)*

DOCTOR. A pain, eh? *(Listens to JUDGE's heart with stethoscope.)* That's funny. Never heard of 'em having a pain. But it's there, all right.

JUDGE *(out of character)*. What's there?

DOCTOR. Oh, nothing—nothing at all. (*LYDIE enters with a glass of water. DOCTOR takes a pill from a bottle in his kit and forces the JUDGE to drink it down.*) Now, take that, and you ought to feel fine in a minute. (*Motions LYDIE to leave.*) I'll call you if I want you. (*LYDIE exits. Then, to JUDGE.*) You'd better come see me at my office to-morrow morning. I . . .

JUDGE (*jumping up*). What? You little scalawag!

DOCTOR. I only meant I ought to look you over more and make sure.

JUDGE. Make sure I pay you! Why, I'm not sick. I've been tricking you, you little tight-wad. I was only acting like I was sick.

DOCTOR. But, Tom . . .

JUDGE. I've got you where I want you now! You thought you'd get me to make your will out free, but I fed you your own pill! I got you to examine me for nothing! (*He laughs loudly and triumphantly.*)

DOCTOR. But, Tom . . .

JUDGE. I tricked you this time!

DOCTOR (*worried*). Yes, yes, you tricked me. But you mustn't get so excited. It ain't good for you.

JUDGE (*convulsed*). Don't! I'll split my sides laughing! . . . Not good for me, eh? Why, I'm as healthy and strong as I ever was. Never felt better in my life. (*His manner becoming serious.*) Didn't find anything wrong with me, did you?

DOCTOR (*nervously*). No, no, of course not. You're fine. But I think you'd better come see me in the morning. There's just a little trouble . . .

JUDGE (*breaking in*). Trouble! Trouble with you is you don't know when you're beaten. Why, there's nothing the matter with me—you just said so. This is the first time in your life you ever gave something for nothing.

DOCTOR. It isn't that, Tom. I . . .

JUDGE. That's all right, Mac. And just to show you I'm a good sport, I'll tell you about that will of yours. (*He looks it over.*) Why, you've left out the name of the beneficiary.

DOCTOR. Yes, the fact is . . .

JUDGE. Well, there's no use making it, anyhow.

DOCTOR. How's that?

JUDGE. Because the only things you bequeath in it are those bonds.

DOCTOR. Well?

JUDGE. And they aren't worth a tinker's damn.

DOCTOR. What do you mean? They're good!

JUDGE. No good. They're counterfeits.

DOCTOR. But, Tom! They can't be! They can't!

JUDGE. Well, they are. My new case is prosecuting the man that sold them. I've got a whole bag full, here.

(Shows bonds in brief case to DOCTOR.)

DOCTOR *(comparing them with his bonds, bewildered)*. You aren't fooling me, are you, Tom?

JUDGE. Not this time. *(The DOCTOR sinks into a chair and holds his head in his hands.)* Aw, don't take it so hard, Mac. You've got lots more money, haven't you?

DOCTOR. No, no! I bought 'em with every cent I had—all my savings.

JUDGE. Aw, I'm sorry, Mac. I thought you were a lot richer. I didn't know. I thought you had lots more.

DOCTOR. Well, I haven't. They're all I've got. . . . And I thought I could leave 'em to you, 'cause *you've* never saved.

JUDGE. Aw, that was good of you, Mac. But they're worthless, and there's nothing I can do—nothing any lawyer can do.

DOCTOR. No, there's nothing we can do. *(He laughs bitterly.)* It's funny, ain't it?

JUDGE. What's funny?

DOCTOR. It's funny—but it ain't right! . . . I was always supposed to be rich—lots of money to live on when I'm old, and you was always supposed to be rich, too—in health. You was so rugged and strong. . . .

JUDGE. Sure, I'm strong—strong enough to work for both of us. I'll see that you never need anything.

DOCTOR. You—you want to take care of me?

(He laughs again.)

JUDGE. Sure. Why not?

DOCTOR. I hate to tell you, Tom, but you ought to know, I guess. We're both of us poor. I haven't any money, and you—you . . .

JUDGE. What are you talking about? I'm not sick, am I?

DOCTOR. No, you're not sick, Tom—you're dyin'. You only got six months more to live—maybe less. And I always thought you were so rugged!

JUDGE. Six months! *(Anger supersedes his bewilderment.)* Damn you! You're just saying those things to get even because you lost your money. You little scalawag you, I'll . . .

(He starts toward the DOCTOR with clenched fists raised.)

DOCTOR. Don't, Tom! It ain't good for you! *(The JUDGE stops on his angry mission. His hand clutches his throat as he tries to get his breath. He staggers against the table, knocking the checker-board to the floor. Then he collapses into a chair.)* See. You mustn't get so excited like that. It's your heart, Tom. It won't last much longer. And there's nothing I can do—nothing any doctor can do.

LYDIE *(voice off-stage)*. Lan' sakes! *(She enters.)* What's all this racket? *(Sees checker-board on floor.)* You two been fighting again?

DOCTOR *(attempting to smile)*. Why, no, we—we . . .

JUDGE *(gasping for breath, pointing at the checkermen strewn about the floor)*. We've just—finished—our little game—that's all. . . .

(He slumps back in his chair and the DOCTOR quickly puts his ear to the JUDGE's heart as)

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ON THE PARK BENCH

A Comedy

By

ESSEX DANE

Miss Essex Dane was born in California, and at the age of six she was taken abroad by her father, who was a journalist. His work was chiefly in London and Paris, and, in moving between these cities, Miss Dane met many interesting personages in the literary world. Her original intention was to be a singer, and she made her début in a special performance of "CARMEN" in London. Later, however, she abandoned the plan of singing professionally, and devoted her entire time to dramatic literature. Long residence in France provided an intimate acquaintance with the French language, and she has appeared at Bouffes Parisiennes in a little play of her own, adapted from a tale by Jean Receptin. In collaboration with her husband, Arthur Lewis, she wrote and produced the play, "A HOUSE DIVIDED," in London. In writing for the theatre, Miss Dane has achieved special distinction with the one-act play. In her volume, "ONE-ACT PLAYS," there are eight short plays, all of uniformly high power and literary excellence. In each play, whether tragedy or comedy, the suspense is sustained with unfailing grasp to the dramatic climax. The themes have variety of light and shade, and the reader or the audience can follow the development of the action without the slightest sense of sameness. Among Miss Dane's better known plays are "FLEURETTE & COMPANY," "WRONG NUMBERS," "HAPPY RETURNS," "THE SERPENT'S TOOTH," "WHEN THE WHIRLWIND BLOWS," "THE WORKERS AT THE LOOMS," "THE WOODEN LEG," "THE WASP," and "LET IT GO AT THAT."

"ON THE PARK BENCH" treats a rather old motif which is here refreshingly original in its technique. This humorous situation has actable elements that are often lacking in comedies where literary quality is the predominant note.

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CHARACTERS

(As they appear)

OLD WOMAN.

SHE.

HE.

MISS WARREN.

FIRST YOUNG MAN.

SECOND YOUNG MAN.

SCENE. A leafy corner in a park.

On the Park Bench

SCENE.—*A leafy corner in one of the large parks. A long seat under the trees. The spot is secluded and countrified, and the noises of the city do not intrude. On the bench are seated—in aloof meditation—right end—a very chic and charming young girl, dressed beautifully in the latest mode—not outré, but elegantly and with distinction. There is no doubt as to the exclusiveness and correctness of her standing. Probably a society “bud,” who has slipped away from espionage. Left end of the bench—is something particularly exquisite and precious, in young manhood—attired after the manner of his kind, in well-fitting morning dress. Neither are taking the slightest notice of each other.*

(Enter an old woman L., with a basket of flowers for sale. She sees the young girl, and goes up to her. The girl's head rests on her gloved hand, and her head is turned away, R.)

OLD WOMAN. Flowers, lady? Violets? *(The girl languidly turns her head, looks at the flowers, and takes a bunch.)* One, lady? *(The girl inclines her head.)* A quarter.

(The girl feels in her hand-bag—looks rather uneasy—then holds out the flowers.)

SHE. I'm afraid I shall have to return them. I've come out without any money.

(The young man at the other end of the bench now turns his head, and becomes attentive.)

HE *(at the other end)*. Won't you allow me? *(He*

holds out some money to the old woman.) It's an awkward predicament—I've been in it myself. *(To the old woman.)* Here—give me another.

(The woman hands him a second bunch—he pays her, then rises, and hands the flowers to the girl with a little bow. The old woman crosses and goes out R.)

SHE. I don't like to—you're very good—but I really can't allow you —

HE. Oh, please accept them. It might happen to anybody. I remember one night, taking a fellow to dine at the Ritz—and after we'd finished our coffee and liqueurs, I found I hadn't a cent. Lucky they knew me there, so well!

SHE. It's my maid's fault. She forgot to change my purse from the bag I was using before lunch.

HE *(smiling)*. We're helpless things, aren't we! I'm putty in the hands of my man. I wear whatever he tells me—accept his taste in ties—gloves—handkerchiefs—plus fours—meekly, without daring to protest.

SHE *(glancing)*. I think he has very good taste!

HE *(pleased)*. Really? Do you? Thank you. *(Corrects himself.)* I mean—I shall tell him a lady—a very chic, elegant lady indeed—of undoubted and supreme good taste—approves of my appearance. It will please—*(Hesitates a moment.)* er—Thompson. Yes, it will please the old fellow. I'm afraid I'm rather severe on him, myself. Last Tuesday—when he was laying out my polo things . . . *(Shakes his head.)* After all, he's a comfort—life's such a rush! A mob of pell-mell social engagements and functions falling over each other all the season. How can one be always studying what one shall wear? From the time I take my early morning canter in the Park—changing for golf—lunch—a reception or two—a run down to Long Island—to the hour I turn into the Club after a dance or supper-party—Thompson dresses me—at discreet intervals—just right, for every function. And for the life of me—I couldn't tell you what clothes I've got on. I really couldn't tell you without looking to see!

SHE. Just as *I* leave myself in Julie's hands. A French maid never makes mistakes. And life is a whirl. I was dancing till four this morning——

HE. You *do* look a little tired. *I* was dancing, *too*, last night. Garden-fête, at Huntingdon. Dazzling affair. We finished up with a moonlight swim—wraps over our bathing-dresses—and we all piled into our cars—sixteen of us—into Long Beach—to Connoti's—to breakfast. Of course you know Connoti's?

SHE (*with a little side-glance*). Of course!

HE. I'm sure I've seen you riding in the Park—in the mornings—on a smart little bay—or was it a black——?

SHE. Sometimes one—sometimes the other.

HE. I *knew* I'd seen you. Do you ever visit the Van Rossiter's place?

SHE. The *Virginia* Van Rossiter's?

HE. No. The *Washington* Van Rossiter's. Billy Van Rossiter's father's a Senator.

SHE. We met them in Paris—or was it Rome—last summer. And coming back on the *Mauretania*—our suite and theirs on the promenade deck—joined.

HE. Oh, do you like the *Mauretania*? I much prefer the *Leviathan*. Their suites are finer. I expect we know lots of the same people. My mother used to share a box at the Opera with the Vanderpelts. *We* had it Tuesdays and Fridays, and they on the off nights. Like music? Opera?

SHE. Adore it.

HE. Mind if I smoke?

(*He pulls a packet of cigarettes from his pocket and is about to light one.*)

SHE. No one's about. I'll have one, too.

(*He looks at the packet.*)

HE (*suddenly*). Good gracious! Whatever has Thompson given me! "Lucky Dogs"! Must have put a packet of the filthy things *he* smokes himself in my pocket by mistake! I can't offer you these!

SHE. Oh, that's all right. I like—(*He looks at her.*) I like to try everything—*once*.

HE. You must let me send you a box of my special "Clubs" (*Politely.*) if you'll allow me to know where I may address them?

SHE. I'm stopping at the Biltmore—for a night or two——

HE. Good. Then I'll——

SHE (*quickly*). But I'm leaving to-morrow—going on a little yachting-trip with——

(*A woman has entered from L. She is walking fast across to R. when she suddenly catches sight of the girl—stops—and stares at her.*)

WOMAN. Why, Mamie Tiggs—what on earth! I like your nerve—sitting calmly down here—with the store crowded with customers—and this cursed three-days' bargain-sale wearing us all to skin and bone! Why——(*She stares again at the girl.*) What in—creation have you got on? "Creation"'s the word! Of all the nerve! If you haven't taken the swell model out of the center of the window and got it on your back! You go back *immediately* and take it off. And if there's a spot or a mark on it—you'll keep it, and be docked out of your wages till it's paid for! You abominable girl! If we weren't so frightfully busy I'd sack——

SHE (*has risen, and is standing painfully frightened and nervous*). Oh, no, Miss Warren—please—oh, don't say that——!

WOMAN. You're no better than a thief!

SHE. Oh, Miss Warren—I—I didn't mean any real harm—I've been as careful——

WOMAN. You go right back to the store and take it off. No harm! I thought it had been sold. Hurry on now—I'll talk to you over there. If you'd taken one of the \$19.50's even! But the best model! If there's a spot, mind—you pay for it! The impudence of you girls!

(*She hustles off. The girl has risen. She stands, the*

picture of misery. Her face is crimson. She does not look at HIM, but she feels his eyes on her, intently. She stands looking down, without speaking.)

HE (*rises—touches her arm. She starts*). Cheer up!

SHE. I wonder what you're really thinking!

HE. A moment ago I was thinking—I'd like to give that old woman a push in the face . . . but I didn't think it would improve your future. Besides, you looked ——

SHE. *How?*

HE. As if ——

SHE. As if ——?

HE. As if it meant a lot to you—to keep that job. As if you—needed it.

SHE. Need it! (*With bitter rush of feeling.*) I'm not a society girl—I've two little sisters to keep—they've no one but me. We're as poor as it's possible to be, in this city—and exist. I've been lying. Now, think what you like. (*She stands defiantly.*)

HE. I think—you're a smashing good sort. Look here. I want to send you something—but it won't be cigarettes—and it won't be to the Biltmore, eh? (*She winces.*) Don't mind a bit of josh! Tell me your real address.

SHE (*flashing at him*). I'm respectable—if I am a liar!

HE (*very hurt*). Was that necessary?

SHE (*defiantly*). Yes. It is. Society fellows, like you, haven't any use for girls in my class, unless —— (*She stops—then continues, still more defiantly.*) I'm a salesgirl, at Trigg's and Trimble's, in Eighth Avenue. I was sick of being poor—and feeling poor, and wearing poor clothes and looking like something the cat dragged in! I took one of the sales-models—and borrowed one of the girls' hats and things without asking, and came out here to forget—and make-believe I was one of those swell girls you read about in "Doings in Society" with a capital "S," in the morning papers. I've had my fun—it lasted just five minutes. And now I'm going back to

the store to take my medicine—and she'll drub the spirit out of me. And to-night I'll be going home, dead sick of life, and tired to death—with some fish under my arm, to cook for the kids' supper. But don't forget I scored—I took you in. I took in a smart society fellow—like you.

(Two common-looking young men have come in sight R., and cross over to L., talking and laughing. Suddenly one of them catches sight of HIM and stops.)

Y. MAN. Hullo, Dickie! Parker's been cursing for you. Oh! *(He makes a rude noise.)* Look at it! Look at him all dressed up, and classy to beat the band! Where did you get it?

2ND Y. MAN. Don't you see what it is? It's that misfit that came back yesterday. He's borrowed it. Don't it look well!

1ST Y. MAN *(laughs boisterously)*. Well, I'm——*(They both roar with laughter.)* If the old man sees you, he'll fire you out so quick you won't know what struck you! He's in a devil of a rage . . . asked where you'd got to.

2ND Y. MAN. Come on. Don't you see he's got a girl? Let him alone. Better sneak in the back way, old man, and take off those togs in the fitting-room! So long!

(They go out. HE turns to watch them off—then, quietly looks at HER. She is standing with her mouth open, watching. He walks over to her quietly.)

HE *(after a moment)*. You see? We're quits.

SHE. "Quits"? Aren't you a swell then?

HE *(bitterly)*. Oh, yes! I'm a hell of a swell—on ten dollars a week at Twisby's, the tailor's—an assistant fitter—and a damned bad one at that! And most of the ten-spot goes to keep my old father and mother. I was sick of looking poor, and feeling poor—and wearing old clothes. You heard what those fellows said about a "misfit"? This is it. It was a misfit for *somebody*—but it might have been made for *me*. But it wasn't, and

never will be. And when I get back to the store, I'll slip into an empty fitting-room—take it off, and repress it. But I've had five glorious minutes—as one of those chaps in the "Society Columns"—with a valet of my own—polo—golf—imaginary plus fours—dinners at the Ritz—and a swell little dame to talk to. It was *great!* I was just beginning to believe in it myself, when your old woman turned up and busted it.

(They both stand, wistful. Then she suddenly starts.)

SHE. Goodness! I must run.

HE. So must I—or I'll lose my job. But at lunch-hour—to-morrow ——

(He looks at her. She looks at him doubtfully.)

SHE. In my old clothes ——?

HE. Same here. *(Impulsively.)* You'd look sweet in anything! *(A minute's silence.)*

SHE *(wistfully)*. It was—a lovely "make-believe"!

HE. Can't we do it again? *(She shakes her head.)*

HE *(with a whimsy smile)*. May I call on you at the ——

SHE *(quickly)*. I'm leaving the Biltmore to-night.

HE. And your address will be ——?

SHE *(slowly)*. Right-hand side—the Park Bench—one o'clock to-morrow—lunch-hour. *(Quickly and shyly.)* Good-bye!

(She runs swiftly, a little way to R. He does ditto—to the L. Then they both turn. He lifts his hat—she nods—then, both turn, R. and L.—and go off, running for dear life—in opposite directions.)

CURTAIN

JON

A Play

By

DOROTHY ODELL SAVAGE

More and more the progress of Art and Literature in the Theatre is committing itself to the non-professional groups who bring to their task enthusiasm, taste and culture, and who go about it with an intelligent purpose of presenting and encouraging plays that may or may not be of value to the commercial manager, but which the stage can ill afford to lose. Miss Savage's play, "JON," can definitely be placed in this category, for the aim of the author is to develop tragedy with the inevitability of the Greek Drama. Laid in a fisherman's hut on the coast of Scotland, it has, in its very fibre, the mist and fog and wind-swept salty flavor of the stormy shore. The characters are fisher-folk, primitive and vivid,—men who go down to the sea in ships and women who wait. The tragic story moves relentlessly with that simplicity and truthfulness which make real drama and real literature. Few contemporary plays will be found more impressive by that public which looks to the theatre for what a well-known dramatic critic has called "an adult art."

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CHARACTERS

MYRA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Mother of Jon</i>
PETER	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Father of Jon</i>
GRANDMOTHER			-	-	-	-	-	<i>- of Jon</i>
LARRY	-	-	-	-	-		-	<i>Jon's old friend</i>
NAN	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Jon's sweetheart</i>
JON								
VILLAGERS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	{ <i>Old Women</i> <i>Old Men</i>

J O N

PROLOGUE

(The curtain rises on the interior of the main room of a fisherman's hut, on the coast of Scotland. At upper right is a huge fireplace with a brick oven at one side. On the mantel are shells and fishing tackle. Near the fireplace, upper right, are shelves with pots and kettles. At right back stands a small table evidently used in cooking. A low stool stands at lower edge of fireplace. In center of the room stands a large table with a red cloth, patched and mended. Beside the table are two kitchen chairs. At lower left is a large spinning-wheel, at which is seated a very old woman who drones to herself as she spins. On the wall above the fireplace hangs a fish net and another is stretched on back center wall. At upper left a torn net is stretched over wooden horses. Beside it are new cords and floats. A door at center back opens outside, one on the left into another room. There is a small window at upper left, one at left back, and one at lower right. There are no curtains. Sun is shining through the window at back. A small boy with short, thick, light hair is playing with a crudely shapen boat in the sun that falls on the floor. At first nothing can be heard except the droning of the old woman and the sound of the spinning-wheel. The boy playing with his boat suddenly tips the little craft over. At this point the sun goes behind a cloud, leaving the floor dark.)

JON (*suddenly running to his GRANDMOTHER*). Oh, see! See! My ship is wrecked an' th' sun leaves it all dark! Look!

GRANDMOTHER (*continuing her spinning*). Aye, Jon, that's th' life o' th' sea. We bear our sons to be fishermen—th' sun goes out an' we be left. 'Tis well ye learn th' lesson sae early.

JON (*plaintively*). But I want my ship an' my sunny sea!

GRANDMOTHER (*spinning*). Aye, we all want it, Jon. We all want it till there be nae want left in us—an' then we jest wait.

JON (*still thinking of his ship*). But I dinna understand!

GRANDMOTHER. Nay, an' ye won't, Jon. That's left for the women.

(The sun comes out and the bright patch is once more on the floor. JON runs to it crying joyously.)

JON. Oh, see! It's back! It's back! Ye didne know! Ye didne know!

(He plays on as he did before. GRANDMOTHER, spinning, looks at JON and shakes her head. Enter MYRA, JON's mother. She is a small woman with dark hair. She wears a drab-colored dress with skimpy waist and rather full skirt. She looks at JON.)

MYRA. Playin' fisherman, Jon?

(JON nods his head and continues playing. MYRA then goes to upper left and starts to work mending the net. Nothing is heard for a few minutes but the noise of the wheel and the dull chant of the old woman. There is a sudden sharp thud against the window-pane. The old woman does not hear it but continues her work. JON looks up toward the window, then drops his boat, which falls upside down, and runs out. MYRA glances up but at once resumes her

work. JON reënters with something held in his two hands. As he does so, the sunlight fades from the room.)

JON (*holding a bird close*). See! Only see! Th' little bird! It flew against th' window an' is dead!

GRANDMOTHER (*suddenly stopping her work*). Jon! Jon! What have ye done! Ye didne bring it in, did ye? Jon! Ye didne!

(She covers her face with her hands and rocks to and fro moaning. JON, frightened, drops the bird on the floor near his ship and runs to her. MYRA, who has also stopped her work, comes forward anxiously.)

JON. Gran! Gran! What's th' matter? Gran! (*He drops on his knees beside her, pulling at her hands.*) Gran!

GRANDMOTHER (*moaning and sobbing*). Ye brot it in! Ye brot it in!

JON (*anxiously*). Yes, but I'll take it out, Gran!

GRANDMOTHER (*still moaning and rocking*). Nae, ye willne, Jon! Ye canne! (*JON looks puzzled into her face.*) Ye brot it in an' ye canne take it out!

(Her voice drones on monotonously. She drops her hands and looks straight in front with unseeing eyes. JON crouches beside her, clutching her apron.)

MYRA. Hush! Gran! Can't ye see ye scare him? (*MYRA kneels down by JON and puts her arms around him.*) It isne so, Jon. It isne so! Don't ye care, Jon!

GRANDMOTHER. It's ten years ye are now, Jon, an' it's ten years more ye shall grow. Ye picked up the bird of ill omen an' ye brot ill into th' house. In ten years ye shall see—in ten years ye an' your mither an' fether—ye shall all see. Ye! Ye! Ye Jon! Ye brot it into th' house. In ten years, Jon!—Ye brot it into th' house!

(JON, terrified, sobs, not heeding his mother, his face hidden in the old woman's lap. For several minutes only the high childish cry is heard. The old woman sits looking stolidly in front. MYRA, still kneeling, is trying to comfort JON. The stage has been growing darker all the time and is now just light enough to distinguish the three figures. JON is still sobbing as the curtain falls.)

CURTAIN

SCENE I

Ten years later. Stage setting same as of PROLOGUE. Only new details are a chair down right front and a fisherman's slicker and hat hanging on the wall near the spinning-wheel at lower left.

(As the curtain rises MYRA, JON's mother, is discovered kneading dough at the little table at right back. Her back is to the audience. She seems smaller and thinner than in the PROLOGUE. Her gray hair is drawn tightly together. She works busily and then taking her hands from the dough, crosses to the door at back center and looks out upon the sea which can be seen through the open door. She shades her eyes and stands so, looking. Her hand drops to her side and with a hopeless shake of her head she recrosses to the table and kneads the dough. A clock on the mantel ticks noisily. Steps are heard outside and JON's father enters. He is a big man with tawny skin and reddish moustache. He wears a heavy blue shirt, which hangs loose outside his trousers. He has on rubber boots. He removes his slicker hat as he comes in and lays it on the table at center and sits down in the chair at left of table. MYRA eyes him anxiously and after a minute speaks.)

MYRA. Well—ye ain't ——? Peter!

PETER (*shaking his head*). No, I ain't heerd nothin'.

MYRA. An' it's twa weeks since Jon's boat isn't come, an' twa weeks is long.

PETER (*heavily*). Aye.

(MYRA *shapes the loaves she has worked and places them in the oven. She stirs something in a kettle which hangs over the fire. She glances at PETER at the table.*)

MYRA. Ye dinna—think he—he—willna come—Peter?

PETER. Shoo, how ye talk! Jest a heavy sea ——

MYRA (*who has gone to the door and is again anxiously looking out*). Nan was in jest afore you come. Her ——

PETER (*absently*). Well ——

MYRA. Her was a-showin' me some beads Jon was for a-givin' her afore he left ——

PETER (*looking up*). Beads? Jon ——

MYRA (*turning from the door*). Yes—her was goin' to wear 'em till Jon come. Then they was for gettin' married.—They was pretty—the beads. (*Her hand creeps up to her throat.*) I'd like some beads.

PETER. You wimmin be jest alike. Alway wantin' sompin' ye havena got. Where'd we be if I was a-spendin' money fer beads? (*Aside.*) Jon!

MYRA. Yes—I know—but they was sae pretty. Nan was that happy she couldne but dance.—She's been a-countin' th' days till Jon gets back. Nan's a real smart girl, Nan is.

PETER (*absently*). Aye, smart.

MYRA. I uster think maybe as how she liked Larry better'n our Jon—(*She goes back to the door and looks out.*)—but she ain't looked at no ane but Jon come six month. (*Pause. She looks out. PETER sits; he stares into space.*) Larry ain't sae friendly to'ard Jon o' late, Larry ain't. It seems sorta queer as not to have him comin' in like as how he uster. He an' Jon ha' played together nigh as long as they was born—they ha' alway been like brothers. But seems as how o' late, Larry

thinks alway on his a-havin' more o' money than Jon. 'Twas alway Larry that had th' shillin' even since they was wee ones. (*Pause.*) I wish ye hadna alway been sae short wi' Jon, Peter.

(*She shades her eyes with her hand.*)

PETER. Jon!

MYRA (*turning*). What was ye a-sayin'?

PETER. Nothin'. Ain't dinner ready? I'm that hungry.

MYRA. Jest a minute. Them loaves ain't quite done.

(*She crosses to the fire and busies herself with the meal. PETER sits watching her. Suddenly NAN appears at the door, breathless. She is a pretty girl of about eighteen. She wears a light blue dress with a white apron. Around her throat is a necklace of bright red beads.*)

NAN. Peter! Myra! (*Both turn quickly toward her.*) Don't ye believe it! It ain't so! I know it ain't so!

MYRA. What ain't so? Ye ain't——?

NAN. It's Larry, I'm a-tellin' ye—an' it ain't so! I know it ain't so! He's lyin'—Jon never stole nothin'!

MYRA. Steal? My Jon steal? Peter, what's Nan a-sayin'?

(*LARRY appears in the door. NAN tosses her head and crosses to MYRA who has come to right of center table. LARRY comes down left.*)

PETER. Well, Larry——

LARRY (*looking from one to the other. He is a big fellow with blunt features, dressed much like PETER and twists his slicker hat as he talks*). I guess ye know from Nan. I ain't said nothin' afore 'cause I kinda hated to hurt ye all but—(*He twists his hat nervously.*)—but I need the money Jon stole th' night afore he left——

MYRA (*fiercely*). Ye lie, Larry, an' ye know it!

PETER. Hush, can't ye?

MYRA. But ye ain't fer lettin' him say nothin' 'bout Jon, be ye?

PETER. Hush, I tell ye! (MYRA glares at LARRY, hurt, wounded and defiant. NAN puts her arm about her. PETER continues.) How do ye know as how it was Jon that took yer money, Larry?

LARRY. How do I know 'twas Jon?

PETER. Aye.

LARRY (*jerkily*). He comed over to my house along the evenin' and was a-talkin' while I figgured up my catch. I had to see onto somethin' outside an' when I come back Jon said he guessed as how he better be a-goin'. Atter he'd gone I found he'd took a pound twa shillin'! That's how I know 'twas Jon.

PETER (*startled*). A pound twa shillin'?

MYRA (*who has never taken her eyes from LARRY*). A lot a reason that is! What ud Jon want with a pound twa shillin' an' him a-sailin' soon atter the morn? I ast ye.

(NAN looks with startled eyes at LARRY. Her hand slowly reaches to the necklace at her throat.)

LARRY (*doggedly*). Howde I know, but he took my pound twa shillin'! (*He looks at NAN who still gazes dazedly at him, one hand on her beads. LARRY suddenly points at NAN.*) P'r'aps as how he buyed them beads fer Nan.

(NAN starts and flushes. MYRA turns angrily toward her. PETER stands silently by, looking at the floor.)

MYRA (*beside herself*). Yes, ye little huzzy, if ye hadna alway been atter Jon fer things an' he a-tryin' t' save ——

NAN (*gasps*). Myra! Ye didna ——

MYRA (*rushing on*). Alway atter trinkets, that's as how ye are. If ye hadna the beads Larry 'ud nae right a-sayin' p'r'aps—Jon stole a pound twa shillin'! Ye didna think ye could live alway an' Jon a-buyin' ye beads?

I never arsked fer nae beads frae Peter—least how we was young.

(The last remark is added hurriedly, consciously.)

NAN *(slipping her arm through MYRA'S)*. Myra, ye know I love Jon —

MYRA *(snorting)*. Love Jon! Ye have nae right t' say that! Go out the village where ye can get fellers t' buy ye beads! Beads! Beads!

(Her voice rises and sobs as she speaks. NAN stands for a moment and then buries her face in her hands and goes slowly toward the door.)

LARRY *(glances at NAN and then at PETER and MYRA)*. Ye heer'd me say as how I needed that pound twa shillin'!

PETER *(heavily)*. I havena pound twa shillin'. Ye'll have t' wait.

LARRY *(looks at NAN who is just going out door)*. Ye ain't it? Well, by morn ye get it. I'll be a-goin' now.

(He jams on his hat and hurries after NAN. MYRA stands at right, her apron thrown over her face, sobbing. PETER is at left, his eyes on the floor.)

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Same as SCENE I. *A week later. Time—the morning. It is raining and blowing outside.*

(MYRA is discovered looking out the door, her back to the audience. PETER enters from door on left. As he enters MYRA turns.)

MYRA *(dully)*. Seems as like I can't see nae more. I ha' looked that much. *(The wind howls and the rain spatters in on the floor. She shudders.)* Awful storm out.

PETER. Aye.

(He busies himself with fastenings of his slicker.)

MYRA. Ye ain't a-goin' out, be ye? It's powerful stormy, Peter; don't ye go! Seems as how I jest had t' have someone t' talk t'. *(Her voice trails off lifelessly. After a pause.)* Ye dinna need t' go sae early, do ye? *(She shuts door and stands with her back against it. PETER at upper left.)* Peter, ye ain't said nothin' 'bout Jon since ye paid Larry th' pound twa shillin'. What made ye do it, Peter? Ye dinna think Jon took it, did ye? *(PETER does not answer, but gazes out window at upper left. MYRA goes on.)* Ye know he dinna! Jon wouldna steal nothin'!—Peter! I been a-prayin' like as I never prayed afore—prayin' that Jon come back an'—an' show that sneakin' Larry—prayin' that he come each day—an' he ain't come yet. *(She looks out of window at back.)* Peter, do ye pray?

PETER. Yes.

(There is a pause. PETER walks across to right and stands looking out of window at lower right.)

MYRA. But ye dinna pray hard enough, Peter.

PETER *(slowly and half aside)*. Ye dinna know how hard. *(Aside.)* God! how hard!

MYRA. Seems as how if we both pray sae hard he'll come. I dreamt last night as how he was a-comin' up the path an' then he disappeared like, an' all I could hear was th' moanin' o' th' wind an' th' water on the rocks. An' through it all I could hear sae plain Gran's voice a-sayin', "In ten years, Jon. Ye brot it in an' ye canna take it out!" *(The wind moans outside.)* Awful stormy. Seems as how I feel as Jon's a-comin'. P'r'aps I better fix his bed, he'll be that tired atter three weeks out.

(She crosses to the door at left and disappears. PETER is still standing looking out of the window at right. NAN enters at center door. She closes it noiselessly behind her.)

NAN. Peter!

PETER (*turning quickly*). Nan!

NAN. I know as how Myra didna like me, but I jest had t' talk to you,—to someone who knows I love Jon—like as how I do. (*She comes down center to table.*) Peter, ye paid Larry, dinna ye?

PETER (*noncommittally*). Yes.

NAN (*coming close to him*). What made ye? Ye dinna believe Jon took it, did ye? (*She looks up into his face. PETER struggles with himself and tries not to look at NAN. Persistently.*) Ye dinna, did ye?

PETER (*desperately, crossing to the right*). Yes!

(*His voice is hard. There is a pause. NAN's hand creeps to her throat.*)

NAN (*hoarsely*). Peter!—Why did ye think sae?

(*PETER stands with his back to NAN.*)

PETER (*turning*). I ain't told no one, Nan, specially his mother——

NAN. Yes?

PETER (*with difficulty*). Well, ye see 'twas this way—Jon come t' me th' night afore he left an' arsked me for a—pound twa shillin'——

NAN (*huskily*). A pound twa shillin'!

PETER. An' I was that short—as how I said nae—
an'——

NAN. An'——

PETER. An' he said—as how he guessed he could get it frae Larry!

NAN (*the full realization dawning upon her*). Oh!

(*Pause.*)

PETER (*turning toward NAN*). An' I ain't as dared t' say nothin' t' his mother—she's that sure he didna take it——

NAN. Peter!

PETER. An' each day I pray, God! how I pray, that he mayna come—that he die afore, so as how his mother mayna know he took it—Nan! ye loved him?

NAN. Yes—Peter.

PETER. Say ye'll pray, pray as how he'll nae come—that he'll go his way as how a fisherman should. (NAN shudders.) Nan, do ye promise? Nan ——?

(The door at left opens and MYRA comes out. She sees NAN.)

MYRA. What do ye want here?

(NAN starts to speak when a knock is heard at the door. PETER goes and opens it. A crowd is seen about the door. Several old men and women, in typical garbs, come in. The women are moaning. Behind them come four men carrying a heavy object in a thick sail, from which water drops to the floor. They lay their burden on the table at center. MYRA stands uncomprehending by the door at left, watching dully the people as they enter. PETER stands by the door silent, relieved. NAN at right, her hands close around her throat. The men who carried the body step to left back. The villagers group themselves at lower left and right, leaving the center free. There are several minutes of silence, then one of the villagers goes to PETER and touches him on the arm.)

VILLAGER *(in almost a whisper)*. Th' Mary Ann come in th' morn, but with the fog an' wind she caught on the Black Reef, an' all was drowned, an' we watchin' frae th' shore.

(MYRA has come slowly forward during the speech. She goes to the table and pulls the sail from the face. She looks for a moment and then carefully covers it over before she drops to her knees beside the table, babbling almost incoherently.)

MYRA. Ye—ye come, Jon! Ye come! Ye come!

(The women start to moan. Suddenly LARRY appears in the door. He looks from one to the other; pauses a moment and then goes to the table and pulls the sail from JON's face.)

LARRY. Jon! (*The moans of the women and the wind and water outside rise and fall. LARRY stands looking for some time as if held by a morbid fascination. He looks at MYRA kneeling, moaning, and at PETER standing stolidly, his hand still on the door knob. His glance returns to MYRA and watches her as she goes through a prayer for the dead. Suddenly he begins to speak excitedly, as though the words were forced by a stronger will than his own.*) Peter! I—I—I lied to ye!—Jon dinna take th' pound twa shillin'!

(*PETER's head jerks up and he stares almost wildly at LARRY.*)

PETER (*dazedly*). He dinna take it?

(*MYRA stops her moaning and rises slowly to her feet, looking at LARRY.*)

LARRY. Nae. (*Chokes.*) He—he borrowed it.

PETER. Borrowed it?

MYRA (*to the body on the table*). Jon! I knew ye'd come an' make it right. I knew ye would, Jon.

NAN. Jon!

PETER (*hoarsely*). Then why'd ye say he stole it?

(*LARRY looks entreatingly at NAN, but she gives no sign. His eyes fall to the floor and he speaks slowly.*)

LARRY. I was that fond o' Nan—an' I thought—as how—Jon wouldna come back—an' p'r'aps if—if—she thought as how he done me wrong—she might listen as how I loved her. (*NAN has been listening with staring eyes as LARRY speaks. She crosses to MYRA on the other side of the table. As LARRY stops speaking he turns and moves toward NAN. His voice breaking.*) Nan, ye couldna, could ye?

(*NAN only turns and hides her face on MYRA's shoulder. LARRY looks at her a moment and then turns and walks slowly out. PETER still stands by the door, every line of his figure sagging. Slowly each*

villager files past the table on which JON's body is laid, looking at the uncovered face. The women throw their aprons over their heads and all file out, passing PETER, who gives no sign. MYRA is the first to speak.)

MYRA. We prayed, Peter—an' God heered—He allus does, Peter—ain't ye glad—ye prayed?

PETER. God!

NAN (*pityingly*). Peter!

MYRA (*dully*). Seems as how it's allus th' way.—We bear our sons t' be fishermen—the sun goes out an' we be left.—Aye, it's the life o' th' sea. (*Pause. NAN stands looking at PETER with horror-stricken eyes. His head has dropped forward on his chest.*) I'll jest be a-fixin' his sheet.—Oh, it'll be nice an' white, Jon, nice an' white.

(She goes slowly to the door at left and disappears.)

NAN. Peter!—Peter, won't ye say nothin'?—Peter! *(She goes to him and takes hold of his arm. He gives no sign.)* Peter! *(She turns and goes slowly to the door at left. Before entering she turns again.)* Peter!

(She looks at him for a moment and then exits. PETER stands for some time just as she left him, by the door, his head dropped forward on his chest. Then he walks slowly down center to the table. He gazes fixedly at JON's face.)

PETER (*in whisper*). Jon!—Jon!—Ye'll—forgive me—Jon! *(The stillness is broken only by the sound of the wind and rain outside. Entreatingly.)* Jon! *(Again the pause.)* Dead!—An'—an' I—prayed——

(His head drops forward. From the room at the left can be heard the distant sobs of MYRA. PETER is still looking at JON as the curtain slowly falls.)

CURTAIN

RORY AFORESAID

A Highland Farce

By

JOHN BRANDANE

John Brandane is the pen name of a Scottish author, Mr. John MacIntyre, who lives in Glasgow. At home his marked successes have been with themes in which there are stirring notes of pathos and tragedy. Much of John Brandane's writing for the stage has found expression through the Scottish National Theatre Society. This vigorous nationalistic impulse has, by means of the drama, aimed to reflect the traditional strength and nobility of the Scottish temperament. Some of John Brandane's dramatic work has already been published, including "THE GLEN IS MINE," "THE LIFTING," "GLENForsa" and "THE CHANGE HOUSE." His efforts are now arresting attention abroad, a notable instance being the translation of "THE GLEN IS MINE" into Norwegian and its acceptance for the Norske Teater in Oslo.

In contrast to his serious drama, John Brandane has, in "RORY AFORESAID," taken the richly humorous situation in the fifteenth-century "FARCE DE L'AVOCAT PATELIN." Four hundred and fifty years after "MAISTRE PIERRE PATELIN" became popular in France, his twentieth-century counterpart appears, with acknowledgment to the anonymous creator of the original, in John Brandane's farce of the Scottish Highlands.

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PERSONS OF THE PLAY

MACCONNACHIE, *the court officer.*

DUNCAN MACCALLUM, *merchant and small sheep farmer
at Ardnish.*

RORY MACCOLL, *shepherd to Mr. MacCALLUM.*

MR. MACINTOSH, *an Oban lawyer.*

THE SHERIFF-SUBSTITUTE, *also from Oban.*

MRS. MACLEAN, *a crofter widow-woman.*

TIME.—The Present.

PLACE.—West Highlands.

“Rory Aforesaid” is founded on “Maistre Pierre Pathelin,” an old French Farce (15th century) of unknown authorship.

RORY AFORESAID

SCENE.—*The Court-House at Torlochan: a large chamber with whitewashed walls, panelled in lower part with yellow pine. Two tall, gaunt windows at back with a door between. To the left is the sheriff's desk, on a platform—a table for his clerk at the side of it. To the right are benches for the public. In the centre of the floor is the table for the solicitors, with chairs around it. Between the table and the right-hand side of the sheriff's desk is the witness-stand.*

(DUNCAN MACCALLUM, merchant and sheep farmer from Ardnish, is walking up and down the empty chamber to keep himself warm, for there is an October chill in the air. He is an erect old man of sixty, with grizzled hair and beard. He wears a square-topped hat, and a muffler is wound over the collar of his stout overcoat. To him there enters the Court Officer, MACCONNACHIE, a man of fifty, with his few remaining dark hairs carefully combed in separate lines across the bald portion of his scalp. He wears a black tie, and his square cut coat has an official look.)

C. O. Will you not be coming in to the fire in the waiting-room, Mr. MacCallum? It's cold in this big tomb of a place.

MACC. No, no! I'm fine here. I want to get used to the Court, you see. I'm forty miles from home, you understand; and I just feel like a fish out of water.

C. O. Och, don't be exciting yourself, now.

MACC. (*looking at a yellow paper in his hand*). What a lot of "saids" and "aforesaids" they put into a summons!

C. O. Well, that's the law, you see. When a lawyer's making a speech, he feels fine if he says "aforesaid," every now and again.

MACC. Do you tell me now? I never thought of that! (*He reads.*) "The sheep aforesaid"—yes, yes,—you'd think it was a very special sheep, if you said it that way. I wonder now if I could be trying that myself when I'm giving my evidence? "Rory MacColl aforesaid." That's fine!

C. O. Och, now, don't you be trying any of that nonsense!

MACC. Well, I'll just be going over in my own mind what I'll be saying to the Sheriff; and then I'll feel more at home, when he comes in, you understand. This will be the witness-box? (*He crosses to witness-stand.*)

C. O. It is that.

MACC. There would be no harm in my standing in it for a wee minute, just to accustom myself to the way I would be feeling when my turn comes?

C. O. No harm at all, Mr. MacCallum! Go you in and welcome!

MACC. Och, you're very kind—very kind—indeed, yes. (*He goes to witness-stand, and holds up his right hand, mumbling over the words of the oath to himself, then smiles, bows and steps down.*) Yes, yes, I'll be doing fine. All the same I'd feel easier if my lawyer was with me this day.

C. O. And have you no lawyer then for this case?

MACC. Well, I was to have had Mr. Thomson from the Oban—the young one—the good one; but the ten o'clock steamer could not take the pier this morning because of the high wind; and the poor man will have been carried on to Mallaig most likely. It's a good thing I came myself by last night's steamer.

C. O. It's peety for Mr. Thomson being taken so far out of his way.

MACC. Och, well, it's a lawyer's fee saved. And I'll do as well as any lawyer when it comes to the bit.

C. O. All the same I like to see a man with his lawyer when a Court is held.

MACC. But man, man! What need of a lawyer when I saw Rory kill the sheep with my own eyes? A fine sheep it was, too—as fine a gimmer as ever you saw, Mr. MacConnachie.

C. O. So I was hearing, but you're forty miles away as you say; and we didna hear much of the business at this end of the country.

(The door at back opens, and RORY MACCOLL comes in. He is a Highland shepherd, aged sixty, and carries a cromag, or long crook of hazel. His bearded face is old and weathered, as is also his suit of rough home-spun. His eyes are sharp and twinkling. At sight of him MACCALLUM turns away in disgust.)

RORY. A fine day, Mr. MacCallum.

(MACCALLUM does not reply. RORY looks up and around the Court-House enquiringly. The COURT OFFICER goes towards him.)

C. O. Good-day! Are you in this case?

RORY. I am that. It's a great stack of stones, this Court-House. What time will you be wanting me?

(He hands some yellow papers to the COURT OFFICER.)

C. O. *(reading them)*. Och! it's you, is it?—Rory MacColl. Eleven o'clock. You'll be having half an hour to wait.

RORY. Half an hour! Is there an Inns in this place?

C. O. There is that. But if I were you, I'd not go near the Inns till your case is over. There's a fire in the waiting-room out there.

RORY. But they'll have a fire in the Inns, too?

C. O. I'm thinking the waiting-room fire will be safer for the like of you, Rory.

RORY *(grinning, as he goes out easily)*. Well, I could be taking a look at both of them, surely.

MACC. *(fuming)*. Did you hear that? The cheek of him! Killing my sheep, and then wishing me a good-day, as cool as you like!

C. O. So that's the man, is it? What way did you not have the police take him up on a criminal charge?

MACC. 'Deed and I don't know why the police would not do that same, when I asked them.—They just said there was too much sheep's-head broth in it, and advised me to claim for damages.

C. O. Only a small debt case, is it? Well, well.

MACC. Aye, just that.—But wait you, and see if it will not turn out a perjury case, before we're done with it.—Wait till you hear Rory swearing away his soul this day!—You never heard his like for the great flow of language—English or Gaelic, it's all the same to Rory—there's no stopping the lying tongue of him!

C. O. As bad as that!

MACC. Aye, as bad as that! Wait you!—For if this place is not struck by lightning as soon as Rory opens his dirty mouth, my name is not Duncan MacCallum.

C. O. Och, if it's lies brings down the lightning, this place would have been rock and lime long ago.

MACC. Well, well! And is that the way of it!

(MR. MACINTOSH, a lawyer from Oban, enters, carrying a black gown on his arm. He is a man of fifty: clean-shaven, and bald-headed. He has narrow, quizzing eyes.)

C. O. Good-day, Mr. MacIntosh!

MACI. Oh, good-day, Mr. MacConnachie!—Look here, this isn't the gown I left here a week ago.

C. O. I'm sorry, Mr. MacIntosh.—Some of the other lawyers must have taken yours last Tuesday. Just you be doing with that one for to-day.

MACI. It's a confounded nuisance, you know.

(He turns to go out.)

MACC. (coming forward). Good-day to you, sir!

MACI. Oh, good-day!—I'm afraid I haven't the pleasure of knowing you.

C. O. This is the pursuer, sir—Mr. MacCallum of Ardnish.

MACC. Yes, yes. Now isn't it strange that you'll not

remember me? You got some Harris tweed out of my shop at Ardnish, a year ago last August.

MACI. Ardnish?—I was never in Ardnish all my life, I'm sorry to say. But a fine place, I hear.

MACC. Och, yes, but you *were* in Ardnish. Yes, yes—a year ago last August.—And I mistook you for a Mr. MacFarlane, a great salmon-fisher that was staying at Ardnish Hotel.

MACI. Well, I'm no salmon-fisher, Mr. MacCallum. And I was never in Ardnish at any time. You're mistaken.

MACC. Am I saying you are a salmon-fisher? . . . All I'm saying is that there was an excursion steamer in from Oban on the day you took the tweed off me. There were many strangers about that day, and you were one of them. And the name you had then was not MacIntosh but MacFarlane, and having that name, I thought you were the great salmon-fisher from the Hotel.

MACI. Sir, do you doubt my word? I tell you again I was never in Ardnish in all my life!

MACC. Och, yes, but you were. A year ago last August. And off you went with ten good yards of Harris tweed in your trap, just in time to catch the steamer, as I found out afterwards.—And that tweed was never paid for. And me not seeing you from that day to this.

MACI. Is this a joke, sir?

MACC. No joke about it. It was ten yards of Harris tweed: and never a penny did I get for it.

MACI. I tell you, sir, it must have been somebody else.

MACC. And I tell you I never forget a face or a voice. And what I say to you is: Pay me for the tweed you stole away from me a year ago last August.

MACI. Stole?—stole? You hear what this man says, MacConnachie? (*He takes out paper and pencil, and makes a note hurriedly.*) He accuses me of theft; and I take you as a witness.

C. O. Och, no, no! I've enough to do with putting other people into the witness-box, let alone myself! For goodness sake, be settling it among yourselves!

MACI. But this is too serious a matter to pass over,

Mr. MacConnachie. Excuse me a moment. (*He goes to door at back, and calls.*) Mr. MacColl! (*RORY enters.*) This isn't your case yet, Mr. MacColl. But something almost as important. (*MACCALLUM moves away, but MACINTOSH puts a hand on his arm.*) Just a moment, sir. Will you now have the kindness to repeat before this good man the words you have just used about myself?

MACC. Good man? And who are you calling a good man?—(*Then to RORY.*) Well, you may be a good man as Neil of the Mountain said to the cat, but you haven't the face of one.

RORY. And who are you to be talking? You're nothing but a whistle and a noise, when all's said and done. Man, man! you'd make a stirk laugh.

MACI. Never mind, Mr. MacColl. Just let him repeat what he said a moment ago in the presence of Mr. MacConnachie here.

MACC. 'Deed, and I'll do nothing so foolish. But I'll be seeing my lawyer to-morrow, about you and my Harris tweed.

MACI. What Harris tweed?

MACC. The Harris tweed you stole from me last August!

MACI. Ah! I thought that would fetch you. You heard, Rory?—He said "stole."

RORY. He did that.

MACC. Och, I'll be staying here no longer with such a pair of thieves.

RORY. Well, it's a poor pair that's no match for one, anyway. [*MACCALLUM flounces out, shouting:*

MACC. I said thieves and I'll stick to it, look you!

MACI. You observe, Rory?—He said "thieves." You heard, MacConnachie.—Please take a note, both of you. (*He scribbles industriously himself.*)

C. O. Och, I'm not taking any notes. I've my own work to attend to. [*He goes out angrily.*

MACI. (*still scribbling*). All right!—Please take a note, Rory, that Mr. MacConnachie refused to take a note, will you?

RORY. Och, no need for notes, for I'll be minding all he said. And I'm no scholar with the pen, anyway.

MACI. (*shutting his note-book with a snap, angrily*). The idea!—Why, I never was in Ardnish in all my life! Called me a thief, did he?—Well, he'll find it's not one penny will settle this little business before I've finished with him!

RORY. Yes, yes!—But about my own case, now?—You were saying you would be giving me the good advice before the Court started.

MACI. It's awkward doing that here.—Somebody might come in.—And we've lost time, too, with that fool and his Harris tweed. (*He makes for the door, but turns.*) No: we can't go into the witness-room now.—Tell you what! Put your foot against that door. (*RORY does so.*) Thank you.—And now I'll give you a few hints. (*He paces up and down, cogitating.*) The old ruffian! Called me a thief! Well, we'll see. Tuts!—Him and his Harris tweed!

RORY. I wish you'd leave that Harris tweed alone, and tell me what to say about the sheep I killed.

MACI. Aha! So you did kill it? Last Tuesday you told me that you didn't kill it!

RORY. Yes, yes; I told you that.

MACI. Well, will you go into that box to-day and swear on oath that you did not kill it?

RORY. Look you! Some of them poor sheep are that bad with the braxy that they're far better killed.

MACI. I know all that.—But will you take your oath that you did not kill MacCallum's sheep?

RORY. Och, take an oath, is it?

MACI. Yes.

RORY. No, no! I have my religion; and I'll take no oath.

MACI. You say you did not kill this sheep?

RORY. No. (*Hesitatingly.*)

MACI. Then why not swear as before Almighty God that you didn't?

RORY. Och, no! I have my religion, you'll understand.—I'm not liking that oath at all, at all.

MACI. Well, what are you going to tell the Sheriff?

RORY. I'll tell him MacCallum didn't see me kill the sheep.

MACI. But MacCallum will swear that he did see you.

RORY. Och, no, it was too dark that night. He couldna see me.

MACI. Man alive! You'll lose your case, if you say that! Look here, Rory! Unless you promise to take the oath, and say you didn't kill that sheep, I'll fling up your case.

RORY. Now, now, Mr. MacIntosh, be you a good man! Don't you be angry with poor Rory. See you this! (*He turns out a dirty purse.*) Look at the good pound notes I have for paying you—that is, if I'll win the case.

MACI. My good fellow, you must pay me, I'm afraid, whether you win or lose.

RORY. Och, is it pay you, if I lose?—No, no!

MACI. Look here, you old humbug! I've had enough of this. You must promise me here and now to settle up as soon as the case is finished. Otherwise I'm off home with the one o'clock steamer.

RORY. Och, very well! The man that divides the pudding will have the thick end to himself, I can see! But I'll promise, if there are to be no oaths.

MACI. You are a stubborn old mule. Why! the Sheriff won't hear you, unless you take the oath.

RORY. I could be having a sore throat, look you, and no can speak.

MACI. Good!—But, no—that won't do. He'd ask you to nod your head very likely as he repeated the oath to you.—Tell you what, though!—Say something silly every time he addresses you, or when anyone speaks to you at all.—Understand?

RORY (*parrot-fashion*). “Something silly.”

MACI. No, no! Say something different each time.

RORY (*parrot-fashion*). “Something different each time.” Will that do?

MACI. You *are* an ass!—An ass?—Aha! I've got it!—You're not an ass, Rory! You're a sheep!

RORY. Is it me?—A sheep?

MACI. Yes, a sheep. And every time you're spoken to by way of question, you must answer like a sheep. Like this!—Baa! Understand?

RORY. Baa!

MACI. Splendid. The Sheriff will think you're off your head, and ask you to stand down. Besides, since MacCallum has no lawyer with him, he's sure to mix his case all up. We're in luck, old son! we're in luck! Ha-ha!

RORY. Aye, laugh away! But it may be no laughing for me, if the Sheriff gets cross. Man, man, if I had a boil, and you squeezing it, you'd still be laughing!

MACI. Sorry, Rory!—No offence!—But, tell me, who is MacCallum's agent? It's quite true, isn't it, that he was carried past the pier in the ten o'clock steamer?

RORY. Yes, it's true enough. It was Mr. Thomson from the Oban.

MACI. Well, he can't get back to-day anyway. Good thing I took the eight o'clock boat, or where would you have been, eh?

RORY. Baa!

MACI. Splendid! You'll look as daft as Lachie Gorra! And MacCallum will be no better when I've finished cross-examining him, let me tell you. Besides, the Sheriff will be in a hurry. He always expects a round of golf before lunch on a Tuesday, if I know his little ways. You watch him scuttling off, as soon's we're through.—Fine! Fine! *(He rubs his hands. Sound of voices outside door at back.)* Hush!—They're coming!—Quick!—Take your foot away from that door now!

(They both come forward into the body of the Court-House.)

C. O. *(entering with MACCALLUM)*. Will you please sit here, Mr. MacCallum? *(He indicates table.)*

MACC. Thank you, Mr. MacConnachie!

(He sits down at table, and drawing out his notes, cons them carefully. MACINTOSH takes a seat at opposite end of table, and refers to his papers also.)

C. O. (to RORY). You'll sit here, Rory.

(He indicates the front bench, facing the SHERIFF's desk.)

RORY. Baa!

C. O. What did you say?

RORY. Baa!

(MACCALLUM looks up in astonishment. Some of the crofters and townsfolk who have entered titter, as they take their seats in the back benches. COURT OFFICER goes out, and ushers in the SHERIFF, be-wigged and gowned.)

C. O. Court!

(All stand, and after the SHERIFF has taken his seat, sit again. The COURT OFFICER whispers to the SHERIFF, pointing to MACCALLUM. The SHERIFF puts his hand to his ear, and says: "Eh?" The COURT OFFICER whispers more loudly. It is evident that his Lordship is slightly deaf; and from the way he peers at his papers it is also clear that he doesn't see very well. Throughout the ensuing scene, his deafness and defective vision are clearly indicated by his various gestures. At times he does not make out who is addressing whom.)

SHER. Ah! most unfortunate!—I'm sorry, Mr. MacCallum, to hear that your solicitor has been carried past the pier, because of the storm this morning. That is so, isn't it?

MACC. Yes, my Lord.

SHER. Then I suppose you will put forward your own case?

MACC. If you please, my Lord.

SHER. Very well. Go on.

(MACCALLUM nods to COURT OFFICER, who goes out by door at back.)

C. O. (in a loud voice). Mrs. MacLean!

(MRS. MACLEAN, a stout Highland crofter woman, with a shock of red hair, appears. She is flustered, and has an aggressive air, as she is ushered into the witness-box.)

SHER. You are Mrs. MacLean, Ardnish?

MRS. M. Yes, my lord.

SHER. (*holding up right hand*). I swear by Almighty God—

MRS. M. (*holding up right hand*). I swear by Almighty God—

SHER. As I shall answer to God—

MRS. M. As I shall answer to God—

SHER. At the great day of judgment—

MRS. M. At the great day of judgment—

SHER. That I shall tell the truth—

MRS. M. That I shall tell the truth—

SHER. The whole truth—

MRS. M. The whole truth—

SHER. And nothing but the truth—

MRS. M. And nothing but the truth.

MACC. (*rising and turning over his papers excitedly*). Mrs. MacLean, was you very fond of sheep's-head broth?

MRS. M. I was that.

SHER. Louder, please. I can't hear.

MRS. M. I—was—that.

SHER. Thank you.

MACC. Was it known to the defender, the aforesaid Rory MacColl, that you was very fond of sheep's-head broth?

MRS. M. It was that.

MACC. Did he ask yourself and Widow MacIver to a meal of sheep's-head broth on the day of the 28th March last?

MRS. M. Was that a Thursday?

MACC. It was that.

SHER. A little louder, please. What did you say, Mr. MacCallum?

MACC. I said "It was that," O Lord—I mean *my* Lord.

SHER. Thank you! Go on, Mrs. MacLean. Tell us if that Thursday was the 28th of March.

MRS. M. Och, I'll no' can mind. But it was the day after Rory killed the sheep.

SHER. Stop!—stop!—stop!—You really must not say a thing like that. It has not yet been proved that anybody killed a sheep. Answer the question—no more. You mean that it was on the day after Mr. MacCallum's sheep was said to be killed?

MRS. M. Said to be killed? It *was* killed. How else could we have the sheep's-head broth?

SHER. But you must not say that. Just answer my question.

MRS. M. And where could Rory have got a sheep's head but from a sheep?

SHER. Ahem! I am afraid, Mr. MacCallum, I am trespassing on your field, but with your permission, I'll interrogate this witness myself.

(MACCALLUM *bows and sits down, saying:*)

MACC. Certainly, O Lord.

SHER. Now, Mrs. MacLean!—You had a meal of sheep's-head broth with Rory MacColl on Thursday, the 28th day of March last? Is that so?

MRS. M. It was a Thursday anyway.

SHER. But is there nothing you can remember which happened about that time that will help you to the exact date?

MRS. M. Well, I saw Rory having the sheep's head singed at the smiddy on the morning of the day we had the sheep's-head broth.

SHER. Well, what morning was that?

MRS. M. The morning after the night that Rory killed the sheep.

SHER. (*more in sorrow than in anger*). That will do, Mrs. MacLean. Any questions, Mr. MacIntosh?

MACI. No, my Lord.

SHER. Stand down, Mrs. MacLean.

(*The COURT OFFICER leads the bewildered MRS. MACLEAN out of the room. MACCALLUM leaves the ta-*

ble and enters the witness-box. He takes the oath in the same form as the former witness.)

SHER. Well, tell us your story, Mr. MacCallum.

MACC. My Lord, having lost of late half a score of sheep, without having had from the aforesaid Rory MacColl a satisfactory account of their decease —

SHER. Did you say "disease"?

MACC. Any way you like it, my Lord.—They were dead, anyway, my Lord—or as good as dead, for I never saw them after the first dipping.

SHER. Yes, yes. Go on, please. Time is short, Mr. MacCallum. Never mind about the dipping.

MACC. I decided therefore to watch said defender, having suspected the deceased Rory—the aforesaid Rory—of having caused decease of sheep aforesaid. (MACINTOSH *laughs audibly behind his hand, hanging his head.* MACCALLUM *hears him, and says angrily:*) Aye, laugh away, MacIntosh!—But I'm not forgetting that Harris tweed!

SHER. (*not perceiving the cause of the interruption*). What's this about tweed? We don't want anything irrelevant. Please let us keep to our sheep, and leave dippings and tweed alone.

MACC. Yes, my Lord.—And a fine sheep it was—as fine a gimmer as ever you saw. I watched Rory through a hole in the wall of the fank on the night of the 27th March last, and saw him kill the sheep—the said 27th of March being the night before the beforesaid sheep's-head broth was made by Rory aforesaid. (MACINTOSH *laughs again involuntarily.*) Aye, laugh away, Mr. MacIntosh, but I'll be even with you yet!

SHER. What's that? Whatever are you talking about, sir?

MACC. I'm talking about the good Harris tweed that was stole from me, and never paid for, O Lord!

SHER. I really can't follow you, Mr. MacCallum. Let us come back to our sheep, if you please.

MACC. Very good, my Lord. I saw Rory aforesaid cut off the head of my good gimmer before my very eyes,

meaning said head, no doubt, for the sheep's-head broth to be made on the 28th March aforesaid. (MACINTOSH *laughs again*.) Yes, you may laugh!—But all the same I'll make you pay for the ten yards of tweed you took away in your trap.

SHER. Ten yards in a trap? Whatever are you saying now, Mr. MacCallum?—Who ever heard of ten yards of a sheep?

MACC. No, my Lord.—Ten yards of good Harris tweed.—Crotal color it was. And it never paid for, since a year ago last August.

SHER. I really don't follow you.—Do, please, let us get back to our sheep. I really wish you had a legal representative here, Mr. MacCallum. Continue.

MACC. I saw him kill the sheep by cutting its throat first of all, my Lord. And then, thinking maybe of the aforesaid sheep's-head broth, he cut off the sheep's head to make the broth aforesaid. (MACINTOSH *chuckles once more*.) Look at him laughing. But you did not laugh when you got into your trap and drove off with the Harris tweed you never paid for!

SHER. Do I understand you to say that the defender caught the sheep in a trap?—Was it a variety of sheep known as a Harris sheep?—I thought that breed was extinct. . . . Is there still a variety called a Harris sheep? We used to call them St. Kilda sheep in my young days. They had three horns or four, had they not?

MACC. My Lord, it wasn't the sheep that was in the trap.—It was the tweed—good Harris tweed, and crotal at that.

SHER. Ah! You mean that the wool lost by the disappearance of the sheep was equivalent to so much good Harris tweed?—Is that it? If that is so, never mind about the tweed just now. We are not concerned with the possible products of the sheep. Let us come back to the sheep itself. We are really not concerned with the tweed.

MACC. Well, if your Lordship will allow me to say so, I'm really more concerned about the tweed than the sheep.

SHER. Yes, yes, I know.—But the sheep comes first, then the wool, then the spinning and the dyeing, then the weaving of the tweed. I know all that. But the sheep comes before the tweed, doesn't it?

MACC. Well, in this case it didn't, my Lord. The tweed was stolen long before the sheep was killed. It was a year ago last August.

SHER. Ahem!—I am afraid I must ask you to discontinue, Mr. MacCallum. Time is short; and I can't follow you into all these irrelevancies. . . . Now, Mr. MacIntosh.

MACI. Mr. MacCallum, you say you saw the defender kill the sheep on the night of the 27th March last?

MACC. I did that.

MACI. At what o'clock did you see this?

MACC. About nine o'clock.

MACI. Was there a moon that night?

MACC. No.

MACI. Had defender a light in the fank?

MACC. No.

MACI. What kind of knife had he?

MACC. I did not see the knife.

MACI. You did not see the knife? Why?

MACC. It was too dark.

MACI. So that you could not see the knife; and yet you saw him kill the sheep?

MACC. I heard him swearing at the sheep, and saying he'd soon kill it. And then I heard the poor beast struggling and groaning, and then it stopped all at once.

MACI. Ah!—So you did not really *see* him kill the sheep?—You *heard* him kill the sheep?

MACC. Yes.—I heard him kill the sheep.

MACI. You heard some sounds, and you thought those sounds came from a sheep in process of being killed?

MACC. I heard him kill the sheep.

MACI. I understand. You admit then that you did not see him kill the sheep.

MACC. I heard him kill the sheep.

MACI. Very well. Now, Mr. MacCallum, attend to me! Will you please tell his Lordship if it is not the case

that a sheep struggles and groans if someone gives it a dose of medicine?

MACC. It might well do that.

MACI. So that the struggling and groaning you heard might not have been the sounds of a sheep in process of being killed.

MACC. I heard him kill the sheep.

MACI. Very well. Now, will you please explain to his Lordship what you mean when you say that you saw the defendant with a sheep of the species called Harris, and measuring ten yards; the said sheep being caught in a trap?

MACC. Never you mind what I mean, Mr. MacIntosh, or Mr. MacFarlane or whatever your name is! . . . But I say you stole a roll of Harris tweed from me in Ardnish, a year ago last August; and it's never paid for yet!

MACI. (*sitting down*). Thank you.

SHER. That will do, Mr. MacCallum. Stand down.

(MACCALLUM, *fuming*, is led back to his seat at the table by the COURT OFFICER. RORY is then taken to witness-box, at a sign from MACINTOSH.)

C. O. You're next, Rory.

MACI. His name is Rory MacColl, my Lord—the defender, aged sixty-two. He hasn't much English.

SHER. (*writing*). Very good. (*Then, holding up his right hand.*) I swear by Almighty God—— (RORY is silent.) Repeat after me. I swear—— He has some English, hasn't he, Mr. MacIntosh?

MACI. Oh, yes, my Lord.

SHER. Can you hear me?

RORY. Baa!

SHER. What do you say?

RORY. Baa!

SHER. I beg pardon. Again.

RORY. Baa!

SHER. Is this man *compos mentis*, Mr. MacIntosh?

MACI. He has certainly been very queer of late, my Lord. Indeed, ever since this dreadful charge has been

levelled against him he has been odd in his manner. He has always been of a gentle, trustful nature. And now that he finds the harsh realities of the world quite other than he had dreamt them to be, it may quite well have fallen out that his mind has become unhinged.

SHER. My dear sir, if there are many more witnesses in this case like this man and his two predecessors, my own mind will certainly become unhinged. See what you can make of him; and then I'll sum up the case.

MACI. Thank you, my Lord. Now attend to me, Mr. MacColl. Did you ever at any time or under any circumstances kill a sheep belonging to Mr. MacCallum?

RORY. Baa!

MACI. Answer me properly, please. Where did you get the sheep's head, of which you made a broth?

RORY. Baa!

MACI. Can't you understand what I say?

RORY. Baa!

MACI. (*to SHERIFF, who is listening intently, with his hand at his ear*). I am afraid it's no use, my Lord. The poor man's head has been turned by this ordeal.

SHER. (*drily*). Yes. Just so. I am afraid, Mr. MacIntosh, you also are of a gentle, trustful disposition. This man may be as you say, but other explanations are possible. But time is short; and we need not go into that. The defender is evidently—evidently, I say, unable to give us any help. The pursuer's case rests on that of Mrs. MacLean and himself. The fact that Mrs. MacLean supped off sheep's-head broth along with the defender on a date of great uncertainty is no doubt of interest, but it is irrelevant. And the pursuer's evidence is also unsatisfactory. He did not see defender kill the sheep. He only heard some sounds, which he interpreted as those emitted by a sheep in its death-agony. I am not an authority on the sounds emitted by sheep, although after listening to Mr. MacColl's performance in the witness-box I feel as if, with a little further study, I might qualify as such. But one does not require to be an authority to see that Mr. MacCallum may have misinterpreted the sounds he heard. I express my regret that

Mr. MacCallum's solicitor was not here to help him with his case. Judgment for the defender, with expenses.

(He rises to go, and all stand, as he goes out by left back. The public file out, laughing, as they discuss the case. MACCALLUM strides over to MACINTOSH.)

MACC. You'll hear more about that Harris tweed before long, Mr. MacIntosh.

MACI. And so will you, my friend! You won't call me a thief in a hurry again. I have two witnesses.

MACC. No, no!—You *had* two witnesses. But now you've only one; for the other's nothing but a big sheep that can only say—Baa!

(He stumps out angrily, and the COURT OFFICER follows him, leaving RORY and MACINTOSH together alone. MACINTOSH takes off his gown, and stuffs his papers into his attaché case.)

MACI. Splendid, Rory! Now that they're all gone, we may congratulate, I think. *(He shakes hands with RORY.)* Well, what about settling up now? No doubt as to whether you won or not, eh?

RORY. Baa!

MACI. That's right! Keep it up for a day or two!—I'll just write you out a receipt. My fee is five guineas. *(He gets pen and paper, and writes.)* Excuse the scrawl. I want to catch the steamer. We'll say five pounds.

(He stamps the receipt, and hands it to RORY.)

RORY *(pocketing it and making for the door)*. Baa!

MACI. You're priceless, old son. But, hurry up, for I must get that boat.

RORY *(going out and sticking in his head through doorway, regards him with a blank face)*. Baa!

[He decamps.]

MACI. My five pounds! Give me back that receipt!

(But the only reply is a distant Baa! MACINTOSH rushes to the doorway and looks after him.)

CURTAIN

THE BITTER END

A Play

By

RICA BROMLEY TAYLOR

Rica Bromley Taylor lives in London. She is the author of several short plays which show uncommon distinction. One of her cleverly contrived comedies, "TWO WOMEN AND A TELEPHONE," was produced by Miss Sybil Thorndyke, at the Aldwych Theatre, London, during the 1924 season. Miss Thorndyke then shared the admirable acting with that other brilliant actress, Miss Irene Rook. This comedy, written for two women only, is the single play by Mrs. Taylor that has before been published.

"THE BITTER END," with very different character types, is in another atmosphere. It tells the tragic bravery of an aged woman during an apparently happy visit from her two sons. The end is unexpected. Our imagination does not conceive what the mother's mental suffering has been until the curtain falls.

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PLAY BUREAU

CHARACTERS

MRS. BOND.

WILLIAM }
SAMUEL } *her sons.*

TIME. Saturday afternoon.

PERIOD. The present.

SCENE. A country cottage parlor, very sparsely and shabbily furnished—everything is spotlessly clean—a few geraniums stand on the window sill—there is a tiny wood fire in the grate.

The Bitter End

(As the curtain rises WILLIAM and SAMUEL are seen passing the cottage window talking very earnestly. The latch is lifted and they enter.)

WILLIAM. Hullo! No one 'ere!

SAMUEL. The old lady must 'ave gorn out!

WILLIAM. P'raps she's in the bedroom—*(He goes to a door leading to the stairs and calls.)* Mother!

(There is no reply.)

SAMUEL. Likely as not she's gettin' a bit o' wood together for the fire—the kettle's on!

WILLIAM. Takes a bit o' time to boil a kettle on a wood fire! but of course she can't afford to go buyin' coal!

SAMUEL. No—nor much else! I wish we'd got the job over.

WILLIAM. You bein' the eldest, you'd better start breakin' it to 'er.

SAMUEL. Not me! you was always 'er favorite!—it isn't as if I——

WILLIAM. Well, I don't neither!

SAMUEL. As far as I'm concerned——

WILLIAM. That's just what I say!

SAMUEL. I don't deny but what Susan's argyments—the way she puts 'em don't seem reasonable——

WILLIAM. And I can say the same thing about Mary——

SAMUEL. It's my belief that they've put their 'eads together and mean to wear us out by nagging!

WILLIAM. Mary don't nag! she turns on the water-taps.

SAMUEL. That's a bit worse!

WILLIAM. 'As the same effect in the long run!

SAMUEL. Every day the same old whine! "'Ow can I afford to do this or that for the children when you 'ave got to keep your mother?"

WILLIAM. That's Mary's "lay" too!

SAMUEL. Of course Susan isn't altogether wrong—market gardenin's a tricky trade, and we've got six mouths to feed, though I own I did pretty middlin' last year!

WILLIAM. I'm not sayin' but what *my* job's a steady one but Jack's taken to cigarette smokin' and 'im only just turned fifteen! and Clara's learnin' the fiddle—then there's Nancy everlastin' at the doctor's with 'er tonsils!

SAMUEL. It costs me a tidy sum to keep my little lot in boots alone, and those gramophone instalments seem everlastingly due! to say nothin' of puttin' a bit by for a rainy day!

WILLIAM. It 'ad to come! I've 'eld out as long as I could!—she's been a damned good mother, Samuel.

SAMUEL. Oh! we know all about that! There's Rosy now in 'Orstralia! She's well married! Why don't *she* do something?

WILLIAM (*uneasily*). Well, to tell you the truth, Samuel, she did send a five pound note over last year for me to give to Mother—but by a slice o' bad luck Mary opened the letter—it come just when we was wonderin' 'ow we was goin' to send the children to the seaside after they'd 'ad measles—and—so ——

SAMUEL. I see! You never told Mother anything about it!

WILLIAM. What was the use when the money was all gone?

SAMUEL. True! But I think I should 'ave been given my share! My fam'ly's bigger than yourn!

WILLIAM. You 'ad the best bits o' furniture when the old man died! Susan collared ——

SAMUEL (*hotly*). Susan didn't collar a stick more than Mary did! Who stuck to the 'Armonium—come—now?

WILLIAM. And me bein' a sidesman and an 'ymn leader—who 'ad more right to it!

SAMUEL. Mother didn't 'alf like partin' with it!

WILLIAM. She'd 'ave 'ad no room for it 'ere!

SAMUEL. It stood over in that corner for a good many years!

WILLIAM. It isn't as if Mother could play it!

SAMUEL. No, but she worked the pedals to cure 'er rheumatics!

WILLIAM. You 'ad the kitchen table and the best bit o' carpet!

SAMUEL. And you 'ad the double bed and the wash-stand!

WILLIAM (*slowly, looking about him*). There wasn't much left for the old lady when we'd 'ad our pick—was there?

SAMUEL. Quite enough—quite enough—livin' all alone as she does! No one can't sleep on two beds at a time, nor yet can they sit on two chairs!

WILLIAM. Lord! what a 'ole it is! 'Ow she ever managed in this box of a place with the old man and all us kids beats me!

SAMUEL. Mother always was a pretty good manager!

WILLIAM. Yes, they don't seem made the same way these days! Two shillin's a week is more'n enough rent for a cupboard like this! The rain's comin' through the ceilin' there, and there, and there—un'althy! She'd be far better looked after in the ——

SAMUEL. Hmn!—I wonder!

WILLIAM. That's you all over—you know we've got a rotten job before us, and you go and make it worse!

SAMUEL. Three and six a week each—seven shillin's between the two of us—it isn't as if it was a big lot of money!

WILLIAM. What's the use of hedgin' like that when we've come down on purpose to tell 'er what we've made up our minds to do!

SAMUEL. When you come to think of it, the fare down 'ere come to six and ninepence a piece!

WILLIAM. I know, but there won't be no other outlay

—she's 'ale and 'earty enough yet to be able to walk the couple o' miles to the — (The door leading to the stairs creaks.) What's that?

SAMUEL. The door creakin', but, like old folks it'll last a long time yet!

WILLIAM. The five bob old age pension, and our seven makes twelve! Ten shillin's left after the rent's paid, for food, light, fire and clothes! 'tain't overmuch—but she's always seemed to be able to get along on it some'ow!

SAMUEL. Some'ow, yes, but there can't be much left over for extras! There isn't any doubt but what she'd be better off in the —

WILLIAM. Well, it's up to us to make 'er see things in the right light! She won't like leavin' the old place!

SAMUEL. Susan says they're very well cared for at the—where—you know—she's well over seventy, it isn't safe for an old woman like 'er all alone! She might 'ave a fall or set 'erself alight, Susan says!

WILLIAM. Mary's always drummin' things like that into my 'ead too! She seems to be talkin' all the time for Mother's good, and—yet when I come to think it over —

SAMUEL. Still, it all comes to this! I can't stand the grindin' I get about it mornin', noon and night! Even the kids 'ave got 'old of it! Only yesterday little Ted says to me, "Dad, Mother says if it wasn't that you 'ave to keep Granny you'd give me a penny a week pocket money!"

WILLIAM. 'Ow are we goin' to put it to 'er?

SAMUEL. Oh! I shall say "Look 'ere, Mother! We're only talkin' for your good —"

WILLIAM. Yes, and I'll butt in with "It's not what we *want* but we're doin' what we think is best for you!"

SAMUEL. That's the style, and I'll say further, "It's goin' to break our 'earts to do it!"

WILLIAM. N-n-no! I should cut that out. Mother's no fool! Better to say "We shall feel more satisfied if we know you're bein' well looked after!"

SAMUEL. There's a few bits o' sticks 'ere that might come in useful! This chair now, it's comfortable though it's been broke!

WILLIAM. I can do with the fender! and the little bed up-stairs'll just about fit Nancy! she's grown out of 'er cot!

SAMUEL. There must be a good few pots and pans about. Mother always sort of clung to them! though there's precious little cooking she can 'ave to do in 'em! That bit of oilcloth isn't so bad; we want a fresh piece for the lobby!

WILLIAM. Then, there's that old cupboard where Mother always kept our toys—(*He opens the cupboard door.*) why—she's—got—'em—still!! (*He takes them out one by one.*) 'Ere's my old wooden 'orse without a tail! and the little cart with the ricketty wheels that Father made for me!

SAMUEL. And there's my old football that I always played with! and the reins that Mother knitted for me! I remember 'ow she walked a matter of four miles to buy the bells to 'ang on to 'em! It was when I 'ad earache so bad——

WILLIAM. And if there isn't the woolly cat that Mother made—the one I always used to take to bed.—And here's Rosy's old doll without a head!

SAMUEL (*gruffly*). Oh! shut the door! I wish she'd come! We've got to catch the four-fifty back again!

WILLIAM. We shan't want to wait 'ere after we've told 'er what we've got to tell 'er!

SAMUEL. I don't see that we've got anything to reproach ourselves about! We've paid our three and six a week reg'lar ever since the old man died twelve year come Christmas, and we've been down to see 'er once and sometimes twice a year!

WILLIAM. That's so—no one could say that we've be'aved bad!—but—couldn't we go on sending the money unbeknown to Mary and Susan?

SAMUEL. Could *you* keep it from Mary?

WILLIAM. N-n-no, now I come to think of it I don't suppose I *could*!

SAMUEL. Susan 'ld worm the truth out o' me in a brace o' shakes! and a nice life I'd 'ave of it!

WILLIAM. Maybe the guardians'll kick!

SAMUEL. Susan's arranged all that. There never was anyone like 'er at provin' the truth of a lie!

WILLIAM. Well, we'd better go through with it!

(The door leading to the stairs opens and MRS. BOND enters; her face is wreathed in happy smiles; she embraces her sons with the deepest affection.)

MRS. BOND. Well! of all the wonderful surprises! the last people in the world that I expected to see! And *both* of you!—Looking so well too, God bless you—to think of me 'avin' forty winks up-stairs and never knowin' you was 'ere! Oh, it does my 'eart good—sit down both of ye—why, it's only a matter of eight months since you came down last! So you *do* think of your old mother sometimes! You must 'ave kind o' known that my 'eart was fair achin' for ye!

SAMUEL. And 'ow's yourself, Mother?

MRS. BOND. Nothing to complain about, Samuel; always something to do, though I'm not quite so active as I used to be! and in the evenin's I sits and thinks about my two good boys, and Rosy all those miles away in 'Orstralia—though I'm afraid she's forgot me——

WILLIAM (*guiltily*). I don't suppose she really 'as, Mother!

MRS. BOND. Well, well, I mustn't judge 'er 'arshly! I can't expect 'er to love the old place as I love it!

WILLIAM. Not much of a place to love, Mother! The wet's all comin' through!

MRS. BOND. Oh! that don't do my old bones no 'arm! I'm used to it—and the neighbors are wonderful kind to me——

SAMUEL. I don't see as 'ow they've done so much!

MRS. BOND. Put on your spectacles, Samuel, my dear, look at that patch in the ceilin'! Young Perkins gave up a football match to mend that for me——

SAMUEL. The wainskirtin' was all to pieces last time we was down!

MRS. BOND. I know, it was fair rotted through! but Mr. Wilson the carpenter stepped in and mended it for me—'e even stopped up the mouse 'oles and you'll laugh when I tell you that I kind o' miss the little bright eyed things runnin' about floor—they seemed sort of company!

WILLIAM. Where's the cat, Mother?

MRS. BOND. Oh! don't speak about 'im, William, don't—I 'ad to give 'im away —

SAMUEL. Give 'im away? Why! you thought the world of 'im!

MRS. BOND. I know, Samuel, I've been grievin' for 'im ever since—but—I couldn't spare the money for 'is drop o' milk. 'E never was a mouser, bein' always so petted, and I couldn't abear to see 'im gettin' thin—but Mrs. Johnson's very good to 'im, and brings 'im to see me once in a while —

WILLIAM. Cat's meat's cheap enough!

MRS. BOND. Everything might be called cheap when there's the money to pay out, William.

WILLIAM. Wipe your eyes, Mother; I don't wonder you get down-'earted bein' so much alone—it ain't good for anybody, least of all the aged and infirm—now, you'd be far better off in the —

MRS. BOND. No, William, I'm never as you may say lonely, there's plenty to do potterin' about in the daytime—keeping my place just so, and when the evening comes I sit quietly 'ere, and I seem to see you two curly 'eaded little chaps and Rosy with 'er fair plaits jumping about the room like you used to—full of life and sperits! lively young scamps you was—and I thinks to myself "Thank God I've got 'em still!"

SAMUEL. I don't 'old with people thinkin'.

MRS. BOND. Maybe you'll think different when you're as old as I am! Only last night I seemed to 'ear your dear father say as plain and natural as could be "Damn them kids, why don't you send 'em to bed!"

WILLIAM. P'raps if you was with other folks! —

MRS. BOND. Bein' with other folks would worry me, William; they'd come in between the things that it comforts me to remember —

SAMUEL. You'd be able to think all the better in a nice dry room, central 'eated, and plenty of light!

MRS. BOND. No, Samuel, it's my own 'ome that I'm 'appiest in full of the sperits of the ones I've loved so dear. Every night I can see your father fillin' 'is pipe and sittin' down so tired, and then layin' 'is 'and on mine as 'e always used to—I should be terrible lonely among a lot o' folks!

WILLIAM. People don't always know what's good for 'em, Mother!

MRS. BOND. Maybe some don't, William, but, at my age, I ought to—and you can't be more than content!

SAMUEL (*clearing his throat*). We came down to-day, Mother, to 'ave a bit of serious talk-like ——

MRS. BOND. Yes, love, and you don't know 'ow grateful I am; sometimes my old eyes fair aches for the sight of you both, and Rosy all them miles away—but don't think I'm grumblin' or complainin'—I'm sure you'd be down oftener if you was able!

WILLIAM. It ain't so long since we was down, Mother!

MRS. BOND. Not so very, my dear! But time doesn't pass over quickly hereabouts!

SAMUEL. That's my argyment, Mother! It's a lot too dull for you 'ere!

MRS. BOND. You're wrong, Samuel, I'm never dull—there's the garden, only a patch I know, but it takes a deal of carin' for, when you can't work very fast—there's taters, and onions, and cabbages, and radishes growin' out there! It all saves buyin', and I counts every blade o' grass!

WILLIAM. You're so thin, Mother, I don't believe you 'ave 'alf enough to eat!

MRS. BOND. Plenty, my boy, plenty; I never was one for my food, got used to it in my young days, 'avin' to go without many a time so as you children should 'ave enough to build you up, but it grieved me that there wasn't enough for the cat ——

SAMUEL. You'd be in better 'ealth if you was to 'ave proper food reg'lar!

MRS. BOND. I'm 'ealthy enough, Samuel, my dear; it's only my 'eart that gives out now and again!

WILLIAM. There! just what I thought—you ought to be somewhere where a nurse could keep an eye on you!

MRS. BOND. A nurse! keep an eye on *me*! No, my lad, it's me that's always done any nursin' that's been wanted, and I dare say I could do it yet—night after night 'ave I sat up with you in my arms, Samuel, when your earache was so bad—singin' to you, and soothin' you —

SAMUEL. I remember well enough —

MRS. BOND. And you, William, when you 'ad the scarlet fever, 'ow you did carry on—me and your poor father used to take it in turns tellin' you fairy stories to 'elp you to forget the pain in your 'ead—and well I mind the day that all your pretty curls was cut off—it fair broke my 'eart!

WILLIAM. I recollect thinkin' that it was well worth 'avin' the fever to get 'em took off!

MRS. BOND. I can see your poor father now, with you in 'is arms walkin' up and down—up and down—up and down —

SAMUEL. No need to upset yourself over it, Mother! All fathers walk up and down more or less!

MRS. BOND. Yes, Samuel, I dessay they do—but not like 'im! not like 'im!

WILLIAM. Oh, come, now, Mother, all fathers walk up and down pretty much alike! and when all's said and done, 'e didn't make no provision for you!

MRS. BOND (*with agitation*). Not one word against 'im! William, not *one* word!

WILLIAM. Who's sayin' a word against 'im?

MRS. BOND. It took 'im all 'is time to bring 'is boys up respectable and to 'ave 'em taught trades—we both always thought of the children first!

WILLIAM. Oh, we know all about that, Mother!

MRS. BOND. You think you do, my lad, but you don't know 'alf 'ow we pinched and scraped and denied ourselves for the three of you—many and many a time we went 'ungry so that your stummicks should be filled—and

that cruel winter when your father was out o' work—I stood at the wash tub from dawn till night—I went out charin'—I fetched water from the pump at a penny a pail in the freezin' cold, and carried it sometimes 'alf a mile, but you children 'ad a roof over your 'eads, and you never missed a meal!

SAMUEL. That's it, you wore yourself out, and now you ought to 'ave a quiet rest —

MRS. BOND. It won't be so long before I get a very quiet rest, my boys.

SAMUEL. Oh, don't go talkin' of graveyards, Mother! You give me the fair creeps—only the other day—er—Susan—er—says—Mother 'ld be a sight more comfortable if she would —

MRS. BOND. Now, I know just what you are going to say, Samuel, you are a-goin' to say that I should be a sight more comfortable if I was to live along of Susan and you—bless your kind 'earts both of you, but I'm best left alone in my own little place! Old people are fidgetty, and maybe the children wouldn't like me sittin' about!

WILLIAM. But, Mother! Mary says —

MRS. BOND. What, Mary too! Your goodness brings the tears to my eyes, but I won't go and live with you and Mary neither! This 'ome where I've lived nigh on fifty year is the only 'ome that I shall ever want!

SAMUEL. A bit of a change would do you good, Mother!

MRS. BOND. At my time o' life, Samuel, people don't want changes—it's change enough for me to see the snow-drops pop their little 'eads through the grass, and to watch the roses go to sleep in the winter—it's change enough to look at the sun risin' up over the 'ill, and droppin' down be'ind them woods —

WILLIAM. You used to do a good bit o' knittin'.

MRS. BOND. Yes, William, I did—and I'm quick at it still—but—it's the wool—now and then the curate's wife comes along with a bit o' knittin' for a charity bazaar—and it's comfortin' to 'ear the click o' the needles again!

SAMUEL. I s'pose she pays you, Mother?

MRS. BOND. Deary me—no—she knows as 'ow I

wouldn't take anything—it's little enough I can do in the way of charity—and everyone so good to me!

WILLIAM. I'll send along a packet o' wool, Mother!

MRS. BOND. Oh, thank ye, William, my dear, that will be a real kindness; you don't know what it'll mean to me—good wearin' wool, choose, and I'll knit some socks for Nancy.

SAMUEL. Got any needles, Mother?

MRS. BOND. Yes, thank ye, Samuel, my steel ones is put away rubbed with a bit o' tallow grease to prevent 'em from rustin'; my wood ones got broke long ago—but I liked 'em better than the new-fangled sort ——

SAMUEL. Might as well put a couple of wood ones in the packet, William.

MRS. BOND. Why, it'll seem like old times again—I never did much readin', and now my eyes won't stand it. It's just as well that you don't write to me, my dears; I should 'ave to get one of the neighbours to read the letters, and I shouldn't like that! But—sit down—sit down—both of ye. Your old mother's forgettin' that you 'aven't 'ad as much as a bite after your journey! The kettle's singin' and I'll make you a nice cup o' tea ——

SAMUEL. We can't wait, Mother!

MRS. BOND. There's a bit o' bread and drippin—and some spring onions, and a radish or two in the garden; sit ye down, and I'll go and fetch 'em! [*Exit* MRS. BOND.]

WILLIAM. Samuel! I can't tell 'er!

SAMUEL. Do you suppose *I'm* goin' to!!

WILLIAM. 'Ow about Susan?

SAMUEL. Damn Susan! What about Mary?

WILLIAM. Damn Mary!

SAMUEL. I'm goin' to make it four and six!

WILLIAM. So will I, and I'll pay off that five pound by degrees ——

(*Enter* MRS. BOND.)

MRS. BOND. 'Ere they are, a fine lot! Put your 'ats down.

SAMUEL. No, Mother, we've got to catch the four-fifty back again, and we 'ave to get to the station.

MRS. BOND. But I don't seem to 'ave 'ad time even to look at you both properly yet!

WILLIAM. Never mind, old lady, we'll be trottin' down again soon—'ere's a couple of 'alf crowns to 'elp along a bit!

SAMUEL. And this piece o' paper'll 'elp to light a fire—(*He gives her a ten shilling note.*) get some coal in, the kettle'll boil quicker, and tell Mrs. Johnson to bring the cat back—we can manage a few pence between us for 'is keep!

MRS. BOND. Oh! William—Oh! Samuel!

WILLIAM. Good-bye, Mother; keep up your courage!

SAMUEL. Good-bye, Mother! There's a good time comin'!

(*Exit WILLIAM and SAMUEL. MRS. BOND totters to a chair, her hand on her heart.*)

MRS. BOND. I don't s'pose I'll last the year out, and I didn't want to die in the *poorhouse*!

CURTAIN

EVARANNIE

A Comedy

By

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

Horace Annesley Vachell has equal distinction as novelist and dramatist. Sometimes he has adapted his novels for the stage, and, as frequently, he has constructed novels from his plays. Mr. Vachell lives within an easy distance from London and his effective and veracious comedies of English life have, almost for a generation, attracted the attention of discriminating London managers. With the high prestige attaching to his name, amateurs and professionals have presented his work in America and have found exceptional appreciation for it. Among Mr. Vachell's longer published plays are "JELFS'," "SEARCHLIGHTS," "QUINNEY'S," and "THE CASE OF LADY CAMBER."

Mr. Vachell has a rare genius for the one-act comedy and "EVARANNIE" is a delightful example. The mutual anxieties, perplexities, and sacrifices of former opulent masters and mistresses and their old household servitors in post-war days in England, with the traditional loyalty and responsibility of each group for the other, are convincingly expressed in the lines.

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CHARACTERS

MY LADY.

EVARANNIE BIFFEN.

BERT.

TIME. Ten P. M.

SCENE. A bedroom.

EVARANNIE

SCENE I

CURTAIN *discloses an empty stage. The bedroom is very simply furnished. There is a single bed L., a door, communicating with a passage R., and a window C., heavily barred. The window has character, being recessed, with a window-seat running round it, and diamond-paned casements. Such a room might be found on the ground floor of any ancient manor house. The furniture—a chest of drawers, a dressing-table, some chairs—is old-fashioned. The curtains are of calendered chintz, and the valence of the bed is of chintz of the same pattern. There is a small table near the bed with a lamp on it, and a small fireplace is R. C. Upon the walls is a simple sprigged paper. There is a hanging book-shelf and a few framed prints. An observer would probably pronounce the room to be an upper servant's bedroom in some house where servants are designedly made comfortable. A stable clock outside strikes ten.*

(EVARANNIE *enters, and switches on the light. She wears a becoming livery, suitable to a head parlor-maid in an establishment where, before the War, a butler and a footman were kept. EVARANNIE begins by inspecting her face in the looking-glass. Obviously she is not perfectly satisfied with what she sees, for she makes a grimace at her own reflection. Then she empties her pockets. From the pocket of her apron she takes a bunch of keys. As she is laying them on the dressing-table, she obviously remembers something.*)

EVARANNIE. Bother ——! (*She snatches up the keys, hurries out of the room, and is absent for a moment. During her absence two sounds are heard. There is a discreet tapping on the closed window, and the slam of a door (off) is audible. EVARANNIE returns, and this time places the keys under her pillow, turning down the bedclothes at the same time. She lays upon the bed a simple nightie, and is about to take off her cap when the tapping upon the window is heard again. EVARANNIE starts, hesitates, and frowns. A low reassuring whistle is heard. EVARANNIE smiles, trips to the window, and flings wide open one of the casements. BERT's head appears. He is a young, good-looking fellow about thirty. EVARANNIE is about the same age.*) Oh! Bert ——!

BERT. Yes, Evarannie, it's me. I've something to tell you. Give us a kiss, dear.

EVARANNIE (*doubtfully*). It isn't safe, Bert.

BERT. Yes; it is, through these bars. Come on! (*They exchange a long lingering kiss. As he releases her.*) That's the stuff to give the troops.

EVARANNIE. I know what's brought you here so late, Bert. You've got a job.

BERT. I've been offered a job.

EVARANNIE. In these parts?

BERT. No. More than three thousand miles away!

EVARANNIE (*dismayed*). Oh, dear!

BERT. I've had a letter from my cousin in New York.

EVARANNIE. Bill?

BERT. Yes—Bill. He's stud groom to a sporting gent of sorts. Bill can get me a billet as valet at wages which mean—you.

EVARANNIE (*with a gasp*). Me ——?

BERT. I can save enough out there to send for you. You'll come when I whistle, won't you?

EVARANNIE (*giving him her hand*). 'Course I will.

BERT. But I've not the cash to get there.

EVARANNIE. Bert, I did ought to have saved something but I haven't. If you spoke to his lordship—you worked here for five years as footman. He—he might advance the money.

BERT. I spoke to him this morning.

EVARANNIE. He refused help?

BERT. He said as how he'd think it over. That means —napoo. He'll give me a whackin' fine character, but that costs nothing.

EVARANNIE. Bert, dear, in their way, which isn't our way, my lord and my lady are driven as we are. I hear 'em talking about it at table. They'd let this big house, if they could. Really and truly they want what we want —a cottage.

BERT (*roughly*). That be blowed for a fairy tale!

EVARANNIE (*earnestly*). It's true as true. At this instant minute my lady is selling her diamonds.

BERT. Don't you believe it!

EVARANNIE. My lady told me so herself. Isn't it a shame?

BERT (*doggedly*). No; it isn't. It fair mads me to see women in furs and diamonds when two million men are out of work.

EVARANNIE. Oh! You Bolshie —!

BERT (*bitterly*). We were promised better wages, easier work, a bit o' leisure, and a home. Lies—lies—lies —!

EVARANNIE (*soothingly*). You did do your bit, dear.

BERT (*fiercely*). What did I do it for? To starve —? To sponge on my own father and mother —? We fought for liberty. And, to-day, I'm a slave. I come back from France to find that you, you, have my job.

EVARANNIE. Do you grudge it to me, Bert?

BERT. It sets a man to thinking. This was my room.

EVARANNIE (*proudly*). And his lordship trusts me. I have the key of the silver safe.

BERT. I don't suppose there's much in it anyway.

EVARANNIE. That's where you slip up. My lady's diamonds are in it. My lord got 'em out of the bank to-day, and he's taking 'em to London to-morrow. They're in the funniest old case. (BERT *coughs, not loudly.*) You ain't got rid of that narsty little cough, Bert?

BERT. It's nothing at all, just a tickling in the throat.

EVARANNIE. Where's your nice warm overcoat?

BERT. Ask Uncle.

EVARANNIE. Oh, Bert, is it as bad as that?

BERT (*gloomily*). Things couldn't be much worse.

(EVARANNIE *fumbles with a string round her neck. She fishes out a ring.*)

EVARANNIE. You gave me this, Bert, before you joined up.

BERT. Best investment I ever made.

EVARANNIE. You told me it cost ten pounds.

BERT. Ten thick 'uns—ten of the best.

EVARANNIE. You take it back, Bert, and get that overcoat out of pawn.

BERT. Not me ——!

(EVARANNIE *replaces the ring.*)

EVARANNIE (*hopefully*). Things might be worse, Bert.

BERT. Meaning ——?

EVARANNIE. You came back. We did ought to be grateful for that.

BERT (*admiringly*). You're a plucky little bit, I do declare. Full o' ginger, too. It beats me you ain't scared o' sleeping in this room.

EVARANNIE. For why?

BERT. It scared me—times. Where do you keep the keys?

EVARANNIE. Under me pillow. (*Points.*) I forgot to lock the pantry door only a minute ago.

BERT. I just wonder if his lordship ever thinks of the risks you run? Not he ——!

EVARANNIE. Wrong again, Bert! When he handed over the keys to me, he says: "I'm trusting you, Biffen." And I blushed as if he'd kissed me. And then he goes on: "You might be asked for that key, if 'twas known you had it. You might be woke up by a burglar. Now, Biffen, if you are, keep your head, and keep a civil tongue in it. Don't scream! You can tell Mr. Burglar, with my compliments, that my plate is fully insured against

burglary. Give him the key, Biffen, and tell him to help himself. You might add, as her ladyship is such a light sleeper, that we hope he will be as quiet as possible.

BERT (*impressed*). Well, I'm damned!

EVARANNIE. That's what his lordship told me, Bert; and that's why I'm not scared.

BERT. I wonder if the diamonds is insured.

EVARANNIE. Course they are. (BERT *coughs again*.) I hate that cough.

BERT. Maybe I smoke too many fags. Are you afraid that his lordship'll hear me coughing?

EVARANNIE. No. His lordship went away this afternoon. He doesn't come back till to-morrow. But somebody might hear you, Bert. It was sweet of you to tell me at once of this offer, which—which means *me*.

BERT. But the passage money?

EVARANNIE. I think his lordship will help.

BERT. I don't. Well, I must off it, I suppose. See you next Sunday? Same old place.

EVARANNIE. I won't keep you waiting, dear. I—I do get so miserable sometimes.

BERT. 'Bout what?

EVARANNIE. Thinking as how we may never get married.

BERT. I think o' that, Evarannie, and it fair drives me desperate. Damn it all—I—I ——

EVARANNIE (*nervously*). Bert, you frighten me so.

BERT (*hoarsely*). I have you, Evarannie. And you—you ain't for sale. Diamonds couldn't buy you.

(*They kiss each other through the bars. BERT disappears. EVARANNIE closes the window. She comes slowly down. She pulls out her ring, looks at it mournfully, and kisses it. She gives a little shiver. Then her face brightens. She flings herself on her knees beside the bed, and bows her head in prayer as the curtain falls. The curtain is down for one minute.*)

SCENE II

SCENE.—*The same. Two hours later. Curtain dis-closes the room almost in darkness, but one curtain is not fully drawn, and through the closed casement moonlight flickers. By this attenuated light, the audience will see EVARANNIE in bed and fast asleep. She is lying on her left side. The audience, therefore, will see fairly clearly her face.*

(The door opens, and a MAN enters on tiptoe. He wears a rough black mask, and he carries an electric torch. Business. The MAN silently approaches the bed and stands at the foot of it. He stares at the sleeping girl. He throws the light of the torch on to the face on the pillow. EVARANNIE moves a little but doesn't open her eyes. The MAN remains perfectly still, but he moves the light off and then again on to her face. EVARANNIE opens her eyes. The MAN switches off the light. EVARANNIE sits up, obviously not quite sure that she is awake. She sees the dark figure at the foot of the bed.)

EVARANNIE *(in a tremulous voice)*. Are you Mr. Burglar? *(No answer. EVARANNIE switches on the light by her bed. The MAN has pocketed his torch. Less tremulously.)* You are Mr. Burglar. His lordship told me to tell you with his compliments that all his plate is fully insured against burglary. I will give you the key of the silver safe. Help yourself, and please, please, make no noise because her ladyship is such a light sleeper. *(EVARANNIE takes the keys from beneath her pillow and holds them out. As the MAN is leaning over the foot of the bed to take the keys, he coughs. With a gasp.)* Bert——! Bert——!

(The MAN tears the flimsy mask from his face and drops it. It is BERT.)

BERT. Shush-h-h! For God's sake.

(In a jiffy EVARANNIE is out of bed, upon the side of

it away from the audience. She snatches from the bed the white counterpane, and covers herself with it. She puts her feet into slippers. Then she comes round C. and faces her lover.)

EVARANNIE (*peremptorily*). Give me back my keys. (BERT *hands the keys to her. She replaces them under her pillow. She comes back to him, and clutches him. In a whisper.*) Bert, dear Bert, why have you done this dreadful thing?

BERT (*hoarsely*). To—to get you.

(*She leads him to the bed. They sit, side by side, on the edge of it.*)

EVARANNIE. You—you were after my lady's diamonds?

BERT (*same stifled voice*). They meant—you.

(*A pause. EVARANNIE'S face is twisted by misery and distress.*)

EVARANNIE (*in a whisper*). How could you get rid of them, Bert?

BERT (*in a more natural voice*). That's easy enough. I'm not the only decent chap who's been driven to this. A pal in my old company is a crook. His lay is sneaking bags at railway stations. I asked him the question you've just asked me. He knows where to go. He can tell me.

EVARANNIE (*gently*). You have done this before?

BERT (*savagely*). Silly ——! Have I had a bob in my pocket this last four months?

EVARANNIE. You mean this is really and truly the first time?

BERT (*sullenly*). 'Course it is.

EVARANNIE. Bert, darling Bert, my own man, will you promise me that you will never, never do it again?

BERT (*fiercely*). No. (*She slips off the edge of the bed, and switches off the light. The pair are almost in darkness.*) Why did you switch off that light?

EVARANNIE (*miserably*). Because I couldn't bear to

see your face. It—it wasn't yours, Bert. I—I hope I shall never see it again. If I do ——

(She breaks off with a strangled sob.)

BERT *(less fiercely)*. If you do ——?

EVARANNIE. I—I think it would kill me.

(She hides her face on his shoulder. A pause. BERT grips her. She sobs faintly. He kisses her. She goes on sobbing, not loudly, but quite evidently unable to control them.)

BERT. Evarannie ——?

EVARANNIE *(in a whisper)*. Yes ——?

BERT. Turn on the light, dear. You sha'n't never see that face again, so help me God!

(She slips from his embrace and switches on the light. She comes back. She sits beside him. He takes her hand.)

EVARANNIE. How could you do it ——?

BERT. How could I do it ——? Have you ever looked at that cottage outside the South Lodge, the one that stands back from the road in its own little garden?

EVARANNIE. Often. But why?

BERT *(with emotion)*. Over there, in France, I always thought of—*that*. I only wanted *that*. Just me and you, Evarannie, in that.

EVARANNIE. I know, Bert, I know.

BERT. The Boches blew *that* to blazes. And to-night you looked so sweet. And I went away with what you said burning, blistering my heart. We have been engaged, dear, for seven long years—faithful to each other . . .

EVARANNIE. Yes.

BERT. Longing for each other . . .

EVARANNIE *(in a whisper)*. Longing for each other ——

BERT. And knowing, day after day, that black bad luck was driving us apart. I can't get work near here. I might get work in the midlands with some damned war

profiteer, but how long will we two have to wait for the parson's blessing if I accept a footman's wage in England?

EVARANNIE (*almost inaudibly*). A long time, dear.

BERT. Too long for me, Evarannie. Well, I went over home after I left you two hours ago, and I remembered what you said about my lady's diamonds being insured and his lordship's instructions to you. I knew my way about this old house. I knew of that broken hasp in the scullery window. The job was as easy as kiss hands . . .

EVARANNIE. Shush-h-h. (*They both listen intently.*) I heard somebody moving.

BERT. I didn't.

(*For the third time EVARANNIE slips from the bed and switches off the light. She stands still, listening. As she does so, the audience will see a thin streak of light under the door.*)

EVARANNIE. Look! Quick! Get under my bed! I'll hide you.

(*BERT obeys. EVARANNIE slips out of the counterpane, and pops into bed. There is a knock at the door. EVARANNIE pretends to be asleep. The knock is repeated louder. MY LADY'S voice is heard outside.*)

MY LADY. Biffen —

EVARANNIE. Who is it? What do you want?

MY LADY. Surely you know my voice, Biffen —?

EVARANNIE (*primly*). Please come in, my lady.

(*As MY LADY enters, dressed in a warm dressing-gown, EVARANNIE switches on the light.*)

MY LADY (*in a kind voice*). Don't be frightened, Biffen.

EVARANNIE. I'm not frightened now, my lady. I—I didn't know it was your ladyship. You—you want me?

(*MY LADY approaches.*)

MY LADY. I have reason to think that a man is in

the house. He may be a burglar. He may come here. If he does, he will have to deal with me.

EVARANNIE (*nervously*). Thank you, my lady. I'm quite all right. Are—are you *sure* that a man is in the house?

MY LADY. Yes.

EVARANNIE. Oh-h-h-h!!!

MY LADY. It is moonlight outside. I couldn't sleep to-night. I was sitting by my bedroom window. I saw a man flit across the lawn, just a dark shadow. He was making for this wing of the house. Any burglar who knows his business could get in. I left my room, went down-stairs, and listened. Presently, I heard sounds, very faint but unmistakable. Instantly, I thought of you, you poor little thing. Burglars always know where to go. I am not going to frighten the other maids. Lie still.

EVARANNIE. Thank you, my lady.

MY LADY. Let him break open the pantry safe, if he can.

EVARANNIE. Very good, my lady.

MY LADY (*with a trickle of laughter*). I should hardly describe an attempt at burglary as very good, but I know what you mean. Shush-h-h! (*She moves silently to the door and opens it. She listens.*) It's very strange, I hear nothing.

EVARANNIE. Your ladyship may have been mistaken.

MY LADY. I'm an old woman, Biffen, but I can still trust my eyes and my ears. (*She closes the door and comes slowly back. As she does so, her eyes fall upon the black mask at the foot of the bed. For an instant she stares at it. Then she bends down and picks it up. In a hard voice.*) What is—this? (*She holds it up.*)

EVARANNIE (*faintly*). I—I don't know, my lady.

MY LADY (*froze*nly). It is a mask, very badly made, obviously the work of a man, I should say, an amateur with his needle.

EVARANNIE (*in a quavering voice*). Yes, my lady.

MY LADY. Why do I find it in your room?

(*She speaks with agitation.*)

EVARANNIE (*desperately*). I'm sure that I'm quite as upset as you are, my lady.

MY LADY (*sharply*). Hold your tongue, Biffen.

EVARANNIE (*humbly*). Yes, my lady.

(*A pause. MY LADY stares at the mask and flings it down with a gesture of disgust. Then she looks intently at EVARANNIE.*)

MY LADY. Of all my maids, you are the one who has earned—I say *earned*—my trust and confidence. You came to me as a girl of eighteen; you have been with me for nearly ten years.

EVARANNIE. Ten, come next Michaelmas.

MY LADY. You—you have let this man into my house, to—to rob *me*.

EVARANNIE. No, no, my lady.

MY LADY. It is nearly always so. A servant betrays her mistress. (*She sighs.*) Where is this man? (*No answer.*) You—you are hiding him. (*Silence. MY LADY goes to the recessed window, and looks behind the curtains. Baffled, she glances about her. There is no hiding place except under the bed. MY LADY bends down and lifts the valence. Quietly.*) Just so. Whoever you may be, come out of that *instantly*. (*MY LADY speaks with all the authority of an autocrat. BERT emerges. MY LADY receives the second shock of an eventful night.*) Why—it's Albert.

BERT. Yes; it's me, my lady.

MY LADY. You have broken into this house to rob me?

(*EVARANNIE sits up in bed, aflame with excitement.*)

EVARANNIE. No, no—*no!* He came to see me, my lady, the woman he loves, the woman who loves him, the woman who would be his wife if this world weren't so cruelly hard on the poor. (*MY LADY is too stunned for the moment to reply. But she picks up the mask again and looks at it in silence. Continuing.*) He—he put that on, because I asked him to. If he were caught in this house at midnight no one would see his face. That's all.

MY LADY. It is quite enough. (*She turns to BERT, who has exhibited nervousness.*) Albert can leave the house. He—he knows his way about it. Go, man, and go—quietly!

(*She raises a minatory forefinger. BERT opens his mouth to speak, but closes it again.*)

EVARANNIE. Please go, dear. (*BERT goes.*)

MY LADY. Where are the keys?

EVARANNIE. Here, my lady.

(*She takes them from beneath the pillow.*)

MY LADY. Give them to me. (*MY LADY takes them. MY LADY sits upon a stout Windsor chair, as EVARANNIE sinks back upon her pillow. She lies quiet as a mouse who sees a big cat about to pounce.*) Is this the first time?

EVARANNIE. Me and Albert has—has met before.

MY LADY (*austerely*). And you are not—*ashamed*.

EVARANNIE. I'd—I'd do it again, my lady.

MY LADY. Um! But not in my house, Biffen. You will have to leave us to-morrow. I'm sorry, but nothing else is possible for me.

EVARANNIE. I quite understand, my lady.

MY LADY (*with a sigh*). I wonder whether you do. I shall say nothing. The other servants must think what they please. The sooner you marry Albert the better.

EVARANNIE. We've been saying that, my lady, both of us, for the past seven years. Holy matrimony, maybe, ain't for the likes of us.

MY LADY (*in a softer voice*). His lordship will have a word with Albert to-morrow. I am very deeply grieved and disappointed. I could have sworn that you were a good girl, incapable of—of this. Life is cruel, as you say, to the poor and also to the rich; but I should be false to every principle I profess if I made light of, or condoned, your conduct. I will try to find you another place, but the truth must be told. I cannot pass you on to another mistress as—as an honest woman.

(*Her voice almost breaks.*)

EVARANNIE. No, my lady.

MY LADY (*quaveringly*). You have served me very faithfully. I shall miss you. I believed a few minutes ago that a man was stealing my diamonds. He was stealing something more precious to me, my faith in you.

EVARANNIE. I am sorry, my lady.

MY LADY (*pulling herself together*). Are you? A moment ago you seemed to be glorying, yes, glorying in your —

EVARANNIE (*piteously*). Perhaps your ladyship misunderstood me.

MY LADY (*alert*). Misunderstood you —? I'll admit that I'm fogged, bewildered. If I thought —

EVARANNIE. Yes, my lady —?

MY LADY. That you had been driven—driven by conditions you cannot control—I should do my best to help you. Your brazen effrontery in saying that you would do it again freezes sympathy at its source.

EVARANNIE (*miserably*). I suppose it do, my lady. Being so high up, you has high principles. If you knew everything you might see your way to—to forgive me.

MY LADY (*hastily*). My forgiveness is nothing!

EVARANNIE. It would make things easier for me, my lady. (*A tap at the door.*)

MY LADY. Heavens! Who's this?

EVARANNIE. It might be Kate.

MY LADY. Kate —?

EVARANNIE. Kate suffers cruel with heartburn, my lady. Maybe she wants a pinch of bicarbonate of sody.

MY LADY (*testily*). Kate's indigestion is most inopportune. (*A cough is heard.*)

EVARANNIE. It's Albert, my lady.

MY LADY (*alert again*). Why should he — (*Breaks off, as tap is repeated.*) Come in! (*BERT enters.*) You have come back, Albert—I'm not surprised—to plead for forgiveness.

BERT (*quietly*). No, my lady.

MY LADY. Then why are you here?

BERT. I was a cur to go away. Your ladyship thinks Evarannie a bad girl.

MY LADY. What I think of Biffen is irrelevant.

BERT (*in a breaking voice*). She's the best girl in all the world.

EVARANNIE (*sharply*). Now, Bert, this isn't the time nor the place, neither, to throw bouquets at me. You pop off quick!

MY LADY (*majestically*). Stay where you are, Albert.

BERT (*explosively*). I came after your diamonds, my lady.

MY LADY (*quietly*). Why?

BERT. I was sure you had 'em insured, my lady. I—I didn't mean to rob *you*.

MY LADY (*not without humor*). Thanks, Albert. But, evidently, you meant to rob the insurance people.

BERT. Yes, my lady. I—I wanted—*her*. (*He points at EVARANNIE.*) And she—she lied, bless her, to—to save a dirty dog, not worth saving—not worth saving.

(*His voice dies away. He stands with bowed head.*)

MY LADY (*trenchantly*). Thank God!

EVARANNIE (*astonished*). I—I beg pardon——?

MY LADY. I'm not, after all, the fool I thought I was. (*BERT and EVARANNIE stare at her. Returning keys to EVARANNIE.*) You will not leave me to-morrow, Biffen.

EVARANNIE. No, my lady, but Albert——

MY LADY. Albert is worth saving. His lordship intended to advance money to take him to America.

EVARANNIE. My lord won't help Albert now.

MY LADY. My lord is quite worried enough with his own affairs. I shall not impose upon him a shock that very nearly upset me. You can go, Albert.

BERT. Yes, my lady.

EVARANNIE. Good-night, Bert.

BERT. Good-night, Evarannie.

(*As he goes out, he coughs.*)

MY LADY. You must take care of that cough, Biffen.

CURTAIN

Not Quite Such a Goose

A Comedy

By

ELIZABETH GALE

Miss Elizabeth Gale is a native of New Jersey and still lives near her birthplace in Woodridge, a little village across the Hudson, about nine miles from New York City. Her major interest has always been with the amateur stage and she has to her credit, as a dramatist, the following group of well-known plays: "Just a Little Mistake," "Aunt Maggie's Will," "The Reformer's Reform," "A Corner of the Campus," "The Romance Hunters," "Miss Molly," and "Boosting Bridget." Miss Gale is also an author of text books and of books for children.

The plot of "Not Quite Such a Goose" was suggested by the story of an old lady who was constantly declaring that she was "not like other folks." For a long time Miss Gale planned to write a play around such a character, but, as she explains, "When I buckled down to work, Albert stepped out in all the pleasant foolishness of youth and I couldn't get rid of him. He claimed the center of the stage and I liked him so well that I let him have it." The characters in the play are comparable to those found in Booth Tarkington's delightful stories. It makes a universal appeal.

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CHARACTERS

MRS. BELL, *a happy mother.*

ALBERT BELL, *her seventeen-year-old son.*

SYLVIA BELL, *her daughter.*

PHILIP FLICK, *Sylvia's sweetheart.*

HAZEL HENDERSON, *Sylvia's friend.*

TIME.—Summer of the present year.

Not Quite Such a Goose

SCENE.—MRS. BELL'S comfortable, but rather worn, living-room which suggests just what the name implies—a room that has been lived in. Forward, to the L., there is a settee with cushions on it and a forgotten work-basket from which sewing materials are trailing. Behind the settee is a table holding a vase of flowers. At the back of the room, toward the L., is a wide doorway leading out of doors. To the R. of the doorway is a screen which partly hides a telephone stand with a chair beside it. At the right of the room is a doorway leading to the hall and other rooms of the house. Forward, at the R., is a flat-top desk with a chair back of it and another one before it.

(As the curtain rises MRS. BELL is discovered in the chair back of the desk, making up accounts and having considerable trouble with her addition. She is a wholesome, attractive, sympathetic woman of about forty. After a moment ALBERT appears in the outer doorway in baseball togs, warm and disheveled and carrying a couple of bats, a mask, catcher's glove and sweater. He strides in noisily.)

ALBERT (coming briskly forward). H'llo, Mom! Say, we trimmed 'em!

MRS. BELL (with a welcoming smile). Good!

ALBERT. We beat 'em all holler! They had us going up to the seventh inning and then—s-sock! (He drops his load with a clatter and strikes his left palm with his right fist.) Didn't we give it to 'em!

MRS. BELL (starting at the sudden crash). Gracious!

ALBERT. You should have seen me pitch those last

two innings, Mom. They couldn't hit a ball. Didn't I bend 'em! And you should have seen Bud Mixie! Say, he's a wonder!

MRS. BELL (*shaking her head dubiously*). He is a wonderful ne'er-do-well and I am sorry to see my son associate with him.

ALBERT (*coming closer to her*). Aw-w, Mom! you don't know Bud. If you ever saw him play ball just once you wouldn't feel that way about him. (*He is leaning against her chair now.*) I wish you would come to a game sometime.

MRS. BELL (*taking his hand affectionately*). I am going to some day, but — (*She lifts his hand and is about to press it to her cheek when she gives it a startled glance and drops it.*) Don't you think, dear, (*Rising and trying not to show all of her disgust.*) that you'd better go and wash up?

(*She moves over to the settee and picks up the forgotten sewing things.*)

ALBERT (*stooping to gather up some of his belongings*). Oh, I suppose so. But if you think I am dirty, you should have seen Bud Mixie. (*Straightening up.*) He slid on his face half-way from the third base home.

MRS. BELL (*astonished*). He did! And he lives way down on the turnpike!

ALBERT. Ha-ha! That's a good one! (*He goes toward her.*) I mean home on the diamond. He made a home run.

MRS. BELL (*carrying the work-basket to the table back of the settee*). Oh, I see! Well, I wish he would run home and stay there. I don't like this Bud Mixie, Albert. He is a low fellow and I wish you would not play with him.

ALBERT. Play with him! Ha-ha! (*He throws his sweater over one shoulder and holds it by a sleeve.*) You sound as if I were two years old.

MRS. BELL (*coming toward him*). I often feel as if you were. It seems only yesterday that you were a tiny bit of a dear little —

ALBERT (*moving hurriedly away*). Oh, all right—all right! Good-bye! I mean I'll wash my ears. (*He runs to the door to the R. and then turns back.*) Say, Mom, are we going to have huckleberry pudding for supper?

MRS. BELL. Yes, dear. You know I promised it to you. But, Albert, Philip Flick is such a nice young man, why don't you ever go with him?

ALBERT (*groans*). How could I? What does he know about baseball? All he can play is tennis. The baby! No real fellow wants to play tennis. Bah! Such a game! But of course Philip plays. (*In a dainty falsetto.*) He is such a sweet little peppermint candy boy I lick my lips when I think of him. Oh, gee!

(*He strides out through the doorway at the R. As ALBERT goes out at the hall door SYLVIA comes in from out of doors, her arms full of bundles, but looking very fresh and trim in her pretty summer dress and wearing a full-blown rose.*)

SYLVIA (*coming forward*). Hello, Mother! I see Albert is home.

MRS. BELL. Yes, he just came in.

SYLVIA (*with a disgusted look at the things he has left on the floor*). He has been playing baseball, too, and I suppose he looks like a tramp.

MRS. BELL (*stooping to pick up ALBERT'S things*). Rather.

SYLVIA (*dropping her parcels on the desk*). Oh, Mother, don't! I'll pick those up. You make a perfect slave of yourself waiting on that lazy——

MRS. BELL (*lifting her hand in protest*). Now, Sylvia!

SYLVIA (*rebelliously*). Well——

MRS. BELL (*eager to change the subject*). Did you get everything?

SYLVIA. Yes, everything. And, Mother, will it be all right for Hazel Henderson to come to supper to-night? I have asked her.

MRS. BELL (*surprised and a little upset*). Why—why, I think so. (*She gathers the packages up from the*

desk.) We are going to have huckleberry pudding for dessert and ——

SYLVIA (*interrupting*). Oh, not huckleberry pudding! It makes the mouth all black and ——

MRS. BELL (*going toward the hall door*). But I promised Albert.

SYLVIA (*following her mother*). But, Mother, please, just this once don't let Albert plan your meals for you. (*She lays her arm caressingly about her mother's shoulders and draws her back to the center of the room.*) Now listen, Mother. Er—after supper Philip Flick is coming and—er—and ——

MRS. BELL (*smiling understandingly*). And black mouths are not becoming. I see.

SYLVIA. Well, of course. You know it looks perfectly horrid. And besides, we are going to the movies, if you don't mind.

MRS. BELL. It would be very nice.

SYLVIA. Philip was going to take me and—er—do you suppose you could coax Albert to take Hazel?

MRS. BELL (*shaking her head decidedly*). Not without the pudding.

SYLVIA. But, Mother —— (*She drops her arm from her mother's shoulder and impatiently moves away a little.*) Oh, dear!

MRS. BELL. You know Albert is just at the age where he despises girls, and he particularly dislikes Hazel Henderson.

SYLVIA. Why, Mother, he doesn't know her. He hasn't seen her for four years. I have visited her and kept in touch with her since she went away, but Bert hasn't seen her and wouldn't know her if he fell over her. He just says mean things about her to tease me.

MRS. BELL (*going toward the hall door*). Well, I'll see what I can do. Of course I'd like him to go with Hazel to-night, but you know how boys are!

(*She goes out.*)

SYLVIA (*sinking down on the settee with a gesture of despair*). Yes, I know! (*There is a rap at the outer*

door and PHILIP FLICK appears on the threshold, a trim, upstanding youth in flannels, with a tennis racket in his hands. SYLVIA jumps up, surprised and pleased.) Oh, Philip! Come in.

PHILIP (*coming into the room*). How are you?

SYLVIA. Fine, of course. Sit down.

PHILIP. No, thank you. I just dropped in to make sure that it was all right about to-night.

SYLVIA. Perfectly all right. You'll be here at seven?

PHILIP. Promptly —

(*They saunter over toward the desk.*)

SYLVIA. Hazel Henderson has come back to town. Did you know?

PHILIP. Yes, I have heard that piece of news. Anything else?

SYLVIA (*laughing*). Yes. She is coming here to supper to-night, and then —

PHILIP (*not altogether pleased*). And then to the movies with us?

SYLVIA (*soothingly*). I am going to get someone else to go with her so there will be two couples—just a nice party. Don't you think so?

PHILIP. Why—er—yes—rather. (*Indicating the flower she is wearing.*) What a beautiful rose!

(ALBERT comes in from the hall just in time to hear this last speech. His hair is wet and uncombed. He has changed his ball suit for a pair of long trousers and white shirt, but wears no tie or coat and carries a pair of slippers in hand. His sister and Philip do not hear the approach of his stockinged feet.)

SYLVIA. I picked it in the garden.

PHILIP. May I have it?

SYLVIA. There are finer ones than this on the bush.

PHILIP. But I prefer this one.

(ALBERT twirls and aims a slipper at PHILIP but as SYLVIA takes a quick step forward he retreats,

startled, behind the screen and from its shelter enjoys the following scene.)

SYLVIA (*going to the table behind the settee*). One of these buds would look well on your coat.

PHILIP (*following her*). Can't I please have the other one?

SYLVIA (*firm but smiling*). No.

PHILIP. Why?

SYLVIA. Because I say so.

PHILIP. Well, if you say so —

SYLVIA (*selecting a bud from the vase*). I think this is the flower for you.

PHILIP (*taking it from her*). I am very grateful. But—(*Handing it back.*) won't you pin it on for me?

(They come forward.)

SYLVIA. Yes, I'll do that gladly.

(ALBERT, behind the screen, is in an agony of disgust.)

PHILIP (*admiringly as Sylvia pins the bud to his coat*). You know just how to do it, don't you?

SYLVIA. I love to handle flowers.

PHILIP. I am sure they love it, too.

SYLVIA (*rather severely*). Don't be foolish, Philip.

PHILIP (*as she finishes the pinning and steps back*). I feel as if I belonged to the Legion of Honor.

SYLVIA (*moving farther away*). You belong to a smaller group than that.

PHILIP (*eagerly*). What do you mean?

SYLVIA. I don't give roses to everyone.

PHILIP (*delighted*). Just to me! (*He caresses his rose and then becomes suddenly dejected and suspicious.*) What are you going to do with that?

(He indicates the rose she is wearing.)

SYLVIA. This? (*She moves farther away from him.*) I might do any one of a number of things with it.

PHILIP (*following her*). For instance?

SYLVIA. I might wear it to-night.

PHILIP. To-night? Oh, yes. To-night we are going to the movies, aren't we?

SYLVIA. And you are to be here at seven.

PHILIP (*starting toward the door*). That's so. Gee! I'd better get along home and dress.

SYLVIA (*teasing*). And don't forget your supper, Philip.

PHILIP. Why should I forget my supper?

SYLVIA. You almost forgot your engagement to-night.

PHILIP. I did not!

SYLVIA. Oh, didn't you?

PHILIP. Are you trying to tease me, Sylvia?

SYLVIA (*very seriously*). Why should I tease you, Philip?

PHILIP. I am sure you wouldn't.

SYLVIA (*smiling sweetly*). Of course.

PHILIP. Well—I —

SYLVIA. Don't be late to-night.

(*She moves toward the door hoping to coax him out.*)

PHILIP. Certainly not. I'll be here promptly at—
at —

SYLVIA. Seven.

PHILIP. Seven sharp. (*At the door.*) Good-bye, Sylvia.

SYLVIA. Good-bye, Philip.

(*PHILIP goes out but comes right back again.*)

PHILIP. Oh, Sylvia, what do you say to going on a picnic somewhere this week?

SYLVIA. I say, we shall have more time to talk that over to-night.

PHILIP. That's so, too. I'll be here at seven sharp. Good-bye. (*He goes out.*)

SYLVIA. Good-bye, Philip.

PHILIP (*back again*). Did you call me?

SYLVIA. I just said good-bye.

PHILIP (*going out reluctantly*). Oh, good-bye, Sylvia.

SYLVIA. Good-bye.

PHILIP (*starting back*). Did you —

SYLVIA. No, I just said *good-bye*.

PHILIP. Good-bye—until seven.

[*Exit.*

SYLVIA (*at the door, waving him on his way*). Good-bye.

(*As she comes back from the door she is horrified to see her brother coming out from behind the screen, smelling and caressing one of his slippers.*)

ALBERT (*ecstatically as he holds the slipper off at arm's length*). What a beautiful rose! No, I don't like those on the bush—they ain't good enough for me. I prefer *this* one. Ah-h-h!—(*He inhales the perfume.*) What a wonderful rose!

SYLVIA (*coming toward him in a rage*). You—you—*villain!*

ALBERT (*going over to the settee*). If you call me names I'll insist on the huckleberry pudding. Mom promised it to me but I said I'd give it up if you wouldn't ask me to take old Hazel NUT to the movies to-night.

(*He sits on the settee and begins to put on his slippers.*)

SYLVIA. Pig!

ALBERT (*dispassionately*). Cow.

SYLVIA. Crocodile!

ALBERT. Pollywog.

SYLVIA. Crab!

ALBERT. Lobster.

SYLVIA. Curmudgeon!

ALBERT. Cullapolooser.

(*He stretches out on the settee as much of himself as it will hold and hangs the rest over the end.*)

SYLVIA (*on the verge of tears*). You are the nastiest, meanest, horriblemest thing in the world.

ALBERT (*complacently*). It runs in the family.

SYLVIA. You go to your room and dress yourself. You look like a perfect freak.

ALBERT (*dangling his slippers from the ends of his toes*). I'd hate to say what you look like.

SYLVIA. You are a nasty tease.

ALBERT. Really! (*Mocking.*) Why should I tease you, Philip, *de-ear*? Ha-ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha-ha! (*He goes off into a paroxysm of laughter.*) Oh, *why* should I tease you, Philip. Ha-ha-ha-ha!

(SYLVIA *rushes to the settee, seizes a cushion and begins to beat him with it.*)

SYLVIA (*using the cushion vigorously*). You—you—you —

ALBERT. Murder! Help! MURDER! Oh, ha-ha-ha!

(MRS. BELL *comes hurrying into the room.*)

MRS. BELL. Children! *Children!*

SYLVIA (*dropping the cushion*). Mother, he is the nastiest, meanest thing!

MRS. BELL. Sylvia, I am ashamed of you. Albert, get right up from that couch.

SYLVIA. Mother, he started to —

ALBERT (*sitting up*). I did not. I never touched her and she began to pummel me. (*Grinning.*) I wonder what Philip would have said if he had seen —

SYLVIA (*stamping her foot*). Oh, Mother, isn't he *mean*!

(*She starts toward the hall door and goes out weeping.*)

MRS. BELL (*to ALBERT*). I suppose you were teasing again.

ALBERT (*rather moodily, hunting for the slippers which have fallen off during the fray*). Can't a fellow have a little fun?

MRS. BELL. Not at somebody else's expense. And I must say, Albert, you behave more like a child of seven than a young gentleman of seventeen.

ALBERT (*standing up*). If you could have seen them, Mom, you would have laughed yourself. (*Mocking.*) Oh, what a be-eautiful rose! Oh! Oh! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!

(He throws himself down on the settee again and goes off into another fit of laughter to his mother's quiet but keen amusement.)

MRS. BELL. I suppose it was all very foolish.

ALBERT *(somewhat recovering himself)*. They talked for half an hour about a dinky little rose. Ha-ha-ha!

MRS. BELL. Of course you would never do anything quite so absurd.

ALBERT *(putting on his slippers)*. I! Humph! I am not quite such a goose!

MRS. BELL *(straightening the cushions of the settee)*. But you are growing up, my son.

ALBERT *(rising to his feet with dawning suspicion and alarm)*. Say, Mom, you are not trying to say that you think I'll grow to be like—like Sissy Flick, are you?

MRS. BELL *(soothingly, but amused)*. No, certainly not. You are going to be just like your own dear self. *(She starts toward the hall door.)* We are going to have supper early to-night.

ALBERT *(following her)*. Say, Mom.

MRS. BELL *(turning back)*. Don't you think it would sound better if you called me *Mother*?

ALBERT *(good-naturedly)*. All right, Mom—Mother.

MRS. BELL. And you know we are going to have company for supper. If you combed your hair and fixed yourself up a little it—it would please me very much, son.

(She starts again toward the door.)

ALBERT. All right, Mother. But I am not going to take any Hazel Nuts anywhere. I gave up the pudding and you know —

MRS. BELL. I know—I know.

(She goes out to the hall. ALBERT takes a necktie from his pocket and puts it on, then he produces a small comb and tiny mirror, sits in the chair before the desk and proceeds to comb his hair, greatly admiring his reflection in the tiny mirror. Finally the telephone-bell rings and he springs up to answer it.)

ALBERT (*at the 'phone*). Hello, Bud! Say, Bud Mixie, you're a good old scout! (SYLVIA *comes in, having heard the telephone-bell.*) That was fine work to-day.—Good boy!—Sure. Come on up.—You'll be here at seven?—All right. So long, Bud.

(*He hangs up the receiver and confronts his sister.*)

SYLVIA (*stiff with righteous scorn*). Have you asked Bud Mixie *here*?

ALBERT (*swaggering over to the settee*). And why not?

SYLVIA. He is a ruffian—that's why. He fights——

ALBERT. No better than you do.

SYLVIA. And he gambles and swears and—(*She starts toward the hall door.*) I am going to tell Mother—and Dad when he comes.

ALBERT. Go on and tell. Who cares! (*As SYLVIA goes out something happens to his foot. He exclaims "Ouch!" limps to the chair before the desk, sits down and takes off one slipper and examines the inside of it. There is a rap at the outer door and HAZEL HENDERSON appears—a stylish, attractive, dainty picture of young girlhood—but he is too deeply absorbed with the slipper to hear or notice her. She raps again, but, quite oblivious to everything else in the world, he shakes the slipper and then thrusts his hand into it, and then peers into it with a grimace and finally tries it on. HAZEL raps again. ALBERT stands up.*) Ouch! Gee! I bet it is a nail!

(*He drops back into his chair and takes the slipper off again.*)

HAZEL (*coming forward into the room*). Did you say come in? I rapped and I thought I heard you say——

ALBERT (*jumping up, slipper in hand*). Great Scott!

HAZEL. Did I startle you?

ALBERT. I—er—oh, that is all right. Er—sit down, won't you? (*Ceremoniously.*) Please be seated.

(*He limps over to the settee.*)

HAZEL (*sympathetically*). What's the trouble? A nail in your shoe?

ALBERT. Er—yah—I—I guess so.

HAZEL. Isn't it terrible! I had one, too, this afternoon. (*She sits on the settee.*) I was down at the ball game and —

ALBERT (*dropping down beside her*). You were! Did you see —

HAZEL. You play? Indeed I did, and you are *some* twirler.

ALBERT (*embarrassed, but flattered*). Well, I do pitch a little better than I used to—but—(*Very modestly.*) I am nothing to brag of. You ought to see Bud Mixie! But I guess maybe you did see him. (*Enthusiastically.*) He is our best all-'round man. He can pitch and he can bat — Say, I don't believe you could throw a ball that he couldn't hit, and he —

HAZEL (*interrupting*). Is he that tall, untidy looking fellow with a lot of coarse hair hanging in his eyes?

ALBERT (*nonplussed*). Why—why —

HAZEL (*very sweetly*). You play lots better than he does.

ALBERT. I do!

HAZEL. Of course you do. You have much better style.

ALBERT (*delighted*). Do you think so?

HAZEL. I know so.

ALBERT. Do you go often to the ball games?

HAZEL. Always—when someone worth while is playing.

ALBERT. Next Saturday we are going to play *The Spiders*.

HAZEL. Will you play?

ALBERT. Sure thing. I expect to pitch.

HAZEL. Then of course I'll be there. I wouldn't miss it.

ALBERT. I'll get a seat for you—the best in the grand-stand.

HAZEL. That would be lovely.

ALBERT. And the next Saturday we are going to play *The Jack Pots*.

HAZEL. And I am going to play tennis. I am booked for a match at the Country Club. Do you play tennis?

ALBERT (*suddenly dejected*). N-no.

HAZEL. It's a great game. It takes skill and agility and judgment, and ——

ALBERT. Perhaps I could learn.

HAZEL. I'd love to teach you.

ALBERT (*glowing*). Really!

HAZEL. I know you would be a fascinating pupil.

ALBERT (*eagerly*). Let's begin to-morrow.

HAZEL. No, not to-morrow. I shall be busy all day to-morrow.

ALBERT. The next day?

HAZEL (*rising*). I have an engagement the next day, too, but (*Smiling very sweetly*.) I'll let you know, and just as soon as I can manage it ——

(SYLVIA comes in from the hall.)

SYLVIA (*coming in*). Hazel! I didn't know you were here.

(HAZEL goes to greet SYLVIA and ALBERT slips hurriedly out of the room.)

HAZEL. I just came a minute ago and have been talking to Albert. I shouldn't have known him if I had met him on the street. Four years make a great difference in a boy.

SYLVIA (*doubtfully*). Do they?

HAZEL. Why, four years ago when I left town Albert was a lawless little gamin in knickers, and now——

SYLVIA (*still warm from her late encounter with him*). He should be caged. I know. I think all boys should be kept under lock and key until they are twenty at least. Perhaps Bert is no worse than the rest.

HAZEL. Well, I should say not! You should see

some of the brothers I know. Your brother is a *gentleman!*

SYLVIA. Oh!

(*Enter MRS. BELL.*)

MRS. BELL. Why, Hazel! How good it is to see you again! (*She greets her affectionately.*) We are so glad to have you come back to town.

HAZEL. We are so glad to be back again, Mrs. Bell. We have found no other place like it.

MRS. BELL. But you must find it changed.

HAZEL. Yes, my little friends and enemies have all grown up.

MRS. BELL. To keep pace with you.

HAZEL. I suppose so.

MRS. BELL (*to SYLVIA*). Perhaps Hazel would like to take a little stroll in the garden.

HAZEL. I should love it!

SYLVIA (*slipping her arm through HAZEL'S*). Come along, then. This way out!

(*She draws her toward the outer door.*)

HAZEL. Au revoir, Mrs. Bell.

MRS. BELL. But don't stay too long.

(*As the girls go out of doors ALBERT comes in from the hall wearing his coat and shoes and looking quite as trim as PHILIP FLICK.*)

ALBERT (*anxiously straightening his collar and tie*). Mother, do I look all right?

MRS. BELL. You look very nice indeed. (*She goes to him and smooths his coat a little.*) And, oh, I have arranged about the pudding, Albert.

ALBERT. The pudding?

MRS. BELL. Ye, we are to have two kinds of dessert—huckleberry pudding for you and Dad, and —

ALBERT (*in dismay*). Huckleberry pudding! Oh, Mother!

MRS. BELL (*astonished*). You wanted it so much?

ALBERT. But, Mother, it makes the mouth all black and ——

MRS. BELL (*suddenly comprehending*). Oh-h!—Well, you don't have to eat it. Dad and I will ——

ALBERT (*interrupting her and turning about for another inspection*). Are you sure I am all right?

MRS. BELL (*with a doubt born of past experience*). You *look* very nice, Albert, but have you washed your hands and cleaned your nails?

ALBERT. Of course. I am not a baby. (*But he inspects his nails critically and polishes them on his palm.*) Baseball is kinder hard on the hands, though, isn't it?

MRS. BELL (*going toward the hall door*). Yes, it is. Now, don't go off anywhere, Albert. Supper will be ready soon; they start for the show at seven, you know.

[*She goes out.*]

ALBERT (*lounging against the desk*). Seven? Seven o'clock! Something was going to happen at seven o'clock to-night. Hum-m-m. Oh, gee! (*It suddenly dawns upon him and he scuttles around to the telephone.*) Gee whizz! Hello, central. Give me Bud Mixie. It's important. What's that? Can't you get them? Oh, I didn't give you the number. 254W. Yes, that's it—254W. Can't you get them? It's important, I tell you. Say—you're ringing them?—Well, ring again. What's that? Why, hello, Bud! Is that you, Bud? I didn't know I was talking to you. Thought I had central all the time. Say, Bud, I am sorry, but it is all off. Huh? About to-night. I can't come out. What? Yes, my mother will let me all right. You needn't be so fresh. No kiddin', Bud, it is all off, I tell you. (*Very virtuously.*) My sister has company and she wants me to take the girl to the movies and I can't turn my sister down cold when she needs me like that. What? (*Horried.*) You'll come along!—No kiddin', Bud, I'll see you to-morrow. Say, cut that out! You needn't talk like that. You can be decent if you do play ball. (*He slams up the receiver.*) The old tough! (*He jams his hands in his pockets and comes*

forward scowling.) Hang it all! I wish I'd never seen him. If he should ever meet me with Hazel!

(SYLVIA comes in from the hall and is almost overcome with astonishment at her brother's trim appearance.)

SYLVIA. Why, Bert, how nice you look!

ALBERT *(delighted)*. Do you think so?

SYLVIA. You are perfect. How did you do it?

ALBERT *(preening himself)*. It just came natural.

SYLVIA *(moving toward the telephone)*. Why don't you try it again sometime?

ALBERT *(alarmed)*. What are you going to do?

SYLVIA. I was just going to call Tom Harris to see if he wouldn't go with us to-night.

ALBERT. Oh, I say, Sylvia! See here. *(SYLVIA comes toward him.)* I wouldn't do that if I were you. There is no need of bothering Tom. I'll go to-night. I don't mind—so very much.

SYLVIA *(going back to the telephone)*. That's awfully good of you, Bert, but you don't need to, really. Tom will be glad to come with us. Tom would go anywhere with Hazel. I would have asked him before but I thought he was out of town.

(She picks up the instrument.)

ALBERT. *Sylvia!*

SYLVIA *(startled, drops the telephone)*. What's the matter, brother, sick?

ALBERT. NO.

MRS. BELL *(from the hall)*. Sylvia. Sylvia.

SYLVIA. Yes, Mother, I am coming. *(To ALBERT.)* I'll bet you had a dozen ice-cream sodas this afternoon and it's *that* that makes you act so queer.

(She goes out quickly at the hall door, leaving ALBERT speechless with indignation, but as she disappears HAZEL comes in from out of doors with a spray of flowers in her hand.)

HAZEL (*waving the flowers at him*). Aren't they lovely?

ALBERT (*quickly forgetting his troubles*). Great!

HAZEL. Smell.

(*She holds the flowers to his nose.*)

ALBERT (*inhaling*). Ah-h. Did you pick them?

HAZEL. In your garden.

ALBERT. May I have one?

HAZEL. Yes. I think this bud would look just right on your coat.

ALBERT. Would you put it there?

HAZEL. If you are good.

ALBERT (*as HAZEL fastens the bud to his coat*). That's great. I—I feel as if I were being decorated.

HAZEL. For bravery? I think you will be some day. There, doesn't that look fine?

ALBERT. I'll say it does!

HAZEL. It is not everyone who appreciates flowers—but I know you do.

ALBERT (*caressing his rose*). You are awful quick at knowing things, aren't you?

HAZEL. Rather. I have been away at school, you see, and I learned quite a lot while there.

ALBERT. Are you—are you trying to tease?

HAZEL (*very innocently*). Why should I tease you?

ALBERT. I don't know, but just then you sounded sort of—sort of like my sister.

HAZEL. Sylvia and I are not one bit alike.

ALBERT. I wish you were.

HAZEL (*astonished and displeased*). What?

ALBERT (*embarrassed and confused*). I mean, I wish Sylvia were different. You—you are all right. You know I think you are all right, don't you?

HAZEL. Why, I hope for the best.

SYLVIA (*calling from the garden*). Hazel.

HAZEL (*to ALBERT, indicating flower*). Do you like it?

ALBERT. It is swell.

SYLVIA (*from the garden*). Hazel.

HAZEL. Coming, Sylvia.

ALBERT. Don't hurry. Say, about that tennis.

HAZEL. We'll have it some day next week.

ALBERT (*as if that were a century off*). Next week!

SYLVIA (*from the garden*). Hazel!

HAZEL (*starting toward the door*). Coming, Sylvia.
(*To ALBERT.*) Don't lose your flower.

(*She waves her hand to ALBERT and goes out, leaving him lost in admiration of his rose. MRS. BELL enters but he does not notice her presence until she is about to seat herself before the telephone table.*)

ALBERT (*waking up*). Mother! What are you doing?

MRS. BELL. Calling up Tom Harris to ask him to go with the girls to-night. Sylvia says——

ALBERT (*holding out his coat lapel*). See my rose?

MRS. BELL (*coming over to him*). Isn't it lovely!

ALBERT. Want to smell?

MRS. BELL. Ah-h! But I never saw you wear a flower before.

ALBERT (*confused*). Well, you see—er—well, you asked me to dress up and——

MRS. BELL (*understanding and thoroughly enjoying the situation*). And you wished to please me. Yes, I see. It was very nice of you, Albert.

(*She starts back to the telephone.*)

ALBERT. Oh, Mother.

MRS. BELL (*turning back*). Yes?

ALBERT. I wouldn't bother Tom. Say, (*He has fumbled with his flower until he has gotten it off.*) I wouldn't mind going to the movies. Honest, I wouldn't.

MRS. BELL (*affectionately, coming nearer to him*). That is good of you, son.

ALBERT. Say, Mother! (*He puts one arm about her shoulders and with the other holds out his precious flower.*) Say, isn't that a be-eautiful rose?

CURTAIN

INSOMNIA

A Modern Morality Play

By

H. F. RUBINSTEIN

Mr. Rubinstein is a London solicitor. If the Law is his chief preoccupation, then playwriting must be his large minor interest. His work commands admiration for its variety of form and subject and his style has great distinction. In three instances, all notable, Mr. Rubinstein has collaborated with other English dramatists. "SHAKESPEARE," a play in five episodes, was written with Mr. Clifford Bax; "EXODUS" was written with Mr. Halcott Glover, and "CHURCHILL" with Mr. A. J. Talbot. These plays are published. "CONSEQUENCES," as yet unpublished, has had brilliant professional productions in America and England. Mr. Rubinstein's other published plays are especially suitable for reading and acting. These are: "WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE DRAMA?" a group of five one-act plays, "OLD BOYHOOD," a finely suggestive little comedy for four male characters, and "PETER AND PAUL," a thought-provoking fantasy, which had its first London production in 1924.

"INSOMNIA"—a modern or burlesque morality play, is an interesting and inimitable experiment. The fantastic clashings inside the mind of a callow youth who, after a hectic day, is endeavoring to get to sleep, are skillfully contrived for representation on the stage.

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CHARACTERS

MELODY.

CURIOSITY.

MEMORY.

THE EGO.

CONSCIENCE.

HOPE.

FEAR.

LIFE FORCE.

SOME NERVES (Optional.)

INSOMNIA

The SCENE represents the Interior of a Junior Clerk's Mind; a region bounded by dark curtains which we may presume to be lifted (revealing who knows what sinister mysteries) when the subject is asleep, which, fortunately or unfortunately, does not occur in the course of our present excursion.

(The following characters are discovered, seen by a dim red light in the foreground: THE EGO, a pale Pierrot in mask and domino, bound hand and foot to a mattress in the centre of the stage; his head reposes upon the lap of MEMORY, a venerable Pantaloon, seated on a low stool behind, CURIOSITY, in the garb of a small boy, reclining at his feet; CONSCIENCE, a Constable, truncheon in hand, paces ceaselessly the length of the stage; MELODY, an elderly artiste, in concert platform attire, hovers about the group in the centre. Each character inhabits a pigeonhole, or kennel, (invisible, if necessary), in the shaded background, to which, when not in action, he or she may, if the producer wills, retire. At the present moment, the three remaining characters, LIFE FORCE, a Troubadour, FEAR, clothed in the sheets of a particular daily newspaper, and HOPE, a Lady Barrister, are protruding from their pigeonholes situated about the centre and the respective corners of the background.)

For the benefit of the obtuser members of the audience, THE EGO, in sepulchral tones, pronounces the following Prologue.

*A word with you, Spectator, ere we open:
Have you experienced insomnia?*

If not—why, then our play is wasted on you;
 The scene obscure, characters unintelligible,
 Action mere mystifying, and our speech
 Positively fatiguing—yea, you shall slumber,
 Who know not impotence to slumber. . . .

But you—

You other—martyrs!—that have groaned and tossed
 And prayed and cursed and counted phantom pigs—
 Night never ending: *you* will understand.

You who have introspected the stark chaos
 Of your own mind, shall you not recognize
 Another mind? Even a humble brother's?
 Surely to goodness! Its inhabitants

All too familiar! (*He introduces them.*) The Cap-
 tive Ego—

Myself—defenceless in a torture chamber,
 The prey of pitiless tyrants: Mad Melody—
 (*Each in turn rising to acknowledge the indication.*)
 Maddening Curiosity, garrulous Memory,
 Stern Conscience, Hope, Fear (truth-perversers both),
 Life Force, a wolf, sheepishly sublimated,
 And Nerves, oh, Nerves, excruciating Nerves!—

(*They scamper across the stage with a whoop.*)

Ah, yes, we are well acquainted, you and I!
 And so we dedicate these dismal revels
 To those who know us—craving their good-will,
 From a safe distance. And even as our fathers
 Would conjure demons but to exorcise them,
 So we, parading these embodied Furies,
 Proclaim our purpose (for be it noted well
 This, as a self-respecting modern play, is
 Nothing if not utilitarian)—

We purpose, then, to entertain you—first—
 And, secondly, to render you immune
 From entertaining us and our attributes
 Till the last sleep of all—when these our actors,
 Being, so I told you before, all spirits,
 Are faded into air,
 And like the baseless fabric of this vision—

(*A chorus of "Amen's" from the other characters, amid which the curtain abruptly descends. As it rises again, MELODY bursts into droning—shall we say the Barcarolle from "Les Contes d'Hoffmann," swaying his body in rhythm. CONSCIENCE pursues his even course, his footsteps resounding like the ticks of a clock. CURIOSITY breaks the verbal silence, as MELODY proceeds from a diminuendo to a full stop.*)

CURIOSITY. What were you saying, Memory?

(*MELODY retires to his pigeonhole.*)

MEMORY (*in a heavy voice*). What was I saying, Curiosity? . . . Dear me, I seem to have forgotten what I was saying. . . . Some silly tune—I don't know what it is—has been running in our head all day, reminding me of something—something quite different from what I was saying—something so pleasant—I wish I could remember it. . . . I'm afraid I'm not as young as I used to be, and my powers are beginning to fail me. There was a time when I could have given you a list of the Kings of England, with the dates of their deaths—or birth—or whatever it was. Whereas now I can't even remember what I was talking about hardly a minute before. Just let me think again. . . .

THE EGO (*involuntarily*). Oh, I'm so tired.

MEMORY. That was it. Of course. I was saying how tired we were, and what a long time it was since we seemed to have had a proper night's rest.

CURIOSITY. How long is it, Memory?

MEMORY. H'm, let me try and recall. Last Monday, after retiring to bed, at a quarter to ten, we managed, between the hours of three and four in the morning, to achieve a slight doze—involving a dream about—dear me, what did we dream about now? It is curious that one can never remember one's dreams. It is no matter, however. . . . On Tuesday, in spite of experiments with hot milk and some extraordinary chemical preparation, we failed to get a wink throughout the whole of a dismal

night! (THE EGO *groans at the long recital.*) On Wednesday, on the other hand, we dropped off some time in the morning—the light had begun to pierce the blinds and curtains, I remember. On Thursday afternoon, thoroughly exhausted, we resorted to a doze in the office.

THE EGO (*suddenly in pain*). Ow!

(CONSCIENCE *is standing behind him, prodding him with his truncheon.*)

MEMORY (*shaking his head*). Yes, yes indeed, well may our Conscience prick us! And it is not the first time we have succumbed during office hours.

THE EGO (*to CONSCIENCE*). I won't do it again. Please leave me alone now. (CONSCIENCE *resumes his pacing.*) I'm so tired, and the night is already far advanced.

CURIOSITY. What's the time, somebody?

MEMORY. It has gone midnight.

THE EGO. That's a relief, at any rate. Oh, those awful twelve strokes—clock after clock—scourging the mind like lashes on the body! It's enough to drive one mad. . . . Oh, but how late it must be!

HOPE (*emerging from her corner, joining the circle in front*). I'm sure we shall get a little sleep to-night!

FEAR (*coming from her corner, trembling as she speaks*). What do you know about it, Miss Hope? I tell you, we sha'n't ever sleep again! There's something horrible the matter with us.

CURIOSITY. Is there? I wonder what it can be?

MEMORY. We've been eating rather a lot lately.

CURIOSITY. What did we have to-day?

MEMORY. Let me think: porridge and bacon and eggs and a bloater for breakfast; curried mutton and apple tart and a bottle of beer for lunch; and for dinner—this evening —

THE EGO. Please don't trouble to go over it all—I'm not in the least interested.

CURIOSITY. If it were indigestion, we should feel something—in another place—shouldn't we?

THE EGO. Of course we should. Of course it's not

indigestion. . . . (*Pointing to CONSCIENCE, as he tramps his course.*) It's that beast making such a row!

CONSCIENCE (*stopping*). Come, come, it's my business to keep an eye on you, night and day, and you know it. If I annoy you, you may be sure you are being justly punished for something you have done wrong.

(*He resumes his walk.*)

THE EGO. I've done nothing wrong. Have I, Memory?

MEMORY. I can recall nothing at the moment. . . . But, as I said before, my powers are sadly on the wane. I can remember a time ——

THE EGO. Not now, please, Memory. The more we remember, the less likely we are to get to sleep.

MEMORY. Of course. We are to get to sleep. I remember now.

THE EGO. To get to sleep—one must think of nothing. Do you understand that?

MEMORY. Certainly. I will make a note of it.

THE EGO. And you, Curiosity?

CURIOSITY. How do you know that's the way to get to sleep?

THE EGO. Never mind about that. . . . Fear, may I rely on you? (*FEAR, with a nervous nod, scuttles back to his pigeonhole.*) And you, Hope?

HOPE. Of course you may. Don't worry. All will be well. (*She, too, retires.*)

THE EGO (*sinking back*). Ah, to sleep—sleep, sleep, innocent sleep ——

MEMORY (*nodding gravely*). In the words of the old tag: (*He declaims.*)

Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care,

The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath.

Balm of hurt minds, great Nature's second course ——

Er—er ——

CURIOSITY. Yes, how does it go on?

THE EGO (*weakly*). What does it matter how it goes on?

MEMORY. Still, it's not so bad to have remembered that much . . . Shakespeare, that is. Hamlet, I expect . . . No, Macbeth, I remember mugging it up for a holiday task. Lord, how long ago it all seems. (THE EGO *groans*.) It was the summer we spent at Clacton. Jolly cricket we used to have on the sands. Shall I ever forget that marvellous swipe that sent the ball skimming over the water, right into a rowing boat! (With a chuckle.) I can feel the thrill of it this very moment.

THE EGO. Memory, what a bore you are. You're enough to send one to sleep. . . . If you only *would*!

MEMORY (*apologetically*). Dear me, I had forgotten. Indeed I beg your pardon. I won't say another word.

THE EGO. Thank you. We'll turn over and forget about everything, and *straf* the first person that speaks again!

(*He lies down and begins to snore vigorously.*

MELODY *gradually steals forward, breaking once more into the Barcarolle—only immediately to retire again, as MEMORY interrupts him.*)

MEMORY (*puzzled*). That tune again. It reminds me of something so sweet and haunting. What can it be, now?

(*He thinks for a bit. LIFE FORCE suddenly emerges, rushing forward in great excitement.*)

LIFE FORCE. Marjory! Marjory!

MEMORY. Marjory! Of course. Yes, yes. To think that it should have escaped me! That was it.

(CONSCIENCE *has stopped suddenly.*)

LIFE FORCE (*rapturously*). Marjory! My little sweetheart! Isn't she a peach! What ages it seems since last I saw her!

MEMORY. This evening, to be precise, Master Life Force.

LIFE FORCE. How angelically she smiled when I

kissed her good-night. Her little lips were made for kisses. From the first moment I set eyes on her ——

MEMORY (*drily*). Two weeks ago.

LIFE FORCE (*taken aback*). Was it only that? It seems like a lifetime! Anyhow, from the first moment I saw her, I realized that she was absolutely the only girl I could ever really be in love with!

CURIOSITY. How many times have we expressed that sentiment in other connections, old Memory?

MEMORY. Dear, oh dear, now you're asking me. I can remember five or six occasions—but it's so difficult to go back beyond a year or two.

LIFE FORCE. I never *meant* it before!

MEMORY. That remark also sounds a trifle familiar.

LIFE FORCE (*irritated*). Anyhow, it's never been the same before. None of the others were half so pretty as she is.

MEMORY. What about Laura?

LIFE FORCE (*contemptuously*). Laura! Pah! Marjory would knock spots out of twenty Lauras! Her beautiful chestnut hair ——

MEMORY. Not unlike Christabel's!

LIFE FORCE. Christabel! Oh, her hair was all right—but compare her eyes with Marjory's! Compare *anybody's* eyes ——

MEMORY. H'm. Dorothy's, for instance?

LIFE FORCE. Dorothy's? . . . Well, anyhow, none of them had such a trim little figure as Marjory ——

MEMORY. Except possibly—what was the girl's name? Lived in Plumstead. . . .

LIFE FORCE (*a little disconcerted*). Mabel, you mean? . . . Hang Mabel! Hang them all! Marjory's worth the lot of them put together! She's a jolly fine bird, I tell you, and if she cares as much for me as I care for her ——

CURIOSITY. Does she, I wonder?

LIFE FORCE. Ah, does she?

MEMORY. She seemed so pleased when we asked her to go to the pictures with us last Saturday.

HOPE (*coming forward*). She loves me!

MEMORY. On the other hand, she was distinctly irritated when we began teasing her about her new jumper.

(HOPE *retires.*)

FEAR (*coming forward*). She loves me not!

MEMORY. But the next day when we gave her that box of chocolates!

HOPE (*coming forward*). She loves me!

MEMORY. And yet, the same evening she could tick us off for staying too long—

FEAR (*again coming forward*). She loves me not!

LIFE FORCE. Whether she loves us or not, come weal, come woe, I'll always love *her*—my adorable little sweetheart!

THE EGO (*desperately*). Damn your adorable little sweetheart!

LIFE FORCE. What's that?

THE EGO. I said, Damn your sweetheart! (*Shouting.*) I'm trying to get to sleep!

MEMORY. Of course, of course. I'm really very sorry.

LIFE FORCE. I won't say another word.

CURIOSITY. For how long, I wonder?

MEMORY. Shut up.

THE EGO. I'm simply *going* to get to sleep to-night. I'll try some dodge . . . counting pigs over a stile. . . . Let me picture it now. . . . There we are: green country . . . an old stile . . . here come the pigs—now then. First man in. Over you go. Whoops! Next, please. Now you. That's three. Now the fat gentleman. He's stuck in the middle! Get on with you. That makes four. Hi, you, where are you going to? Look out, they're running away! Stop them! Stop them!

FEAR (*running forward*). What's the matter?

THE EGO. They're running away—all my pretty birds! No, they're hawks—or eagles! They're carrying Marjory away with them!

FEAR. Help! Help!

LIFE FORCE. You shall have my life—before you take

that woman! She is my affianced bride! Release her this instant!

CURIOSITY (*drowsily*). What *are* they all talking about?

THE EGO (*with a start*). Where am I? Oh, I'm awake! I had such a nightmare! I dreamt—what was it all about, now?

MEMORY. Let me think. It was something to do with Marjory.

LIFE FORCE. Yes, yes! Marjory!

THE EGO. She is never out of my thoughts. . . .
(CONSCIENCE, *behind him, begins to prod with his truncheon.*) What's the matter?

CONSCIENCE. You want to know why you can't get to sleep at nights. You've just given us the reason.

THE EGO. What was I saying? About Marjory. . . . I was saying she was always in my mind. So she is. . . . You mean the thought of her keeps me awake?

CONSCIENCE. I mean something more than that. I keep you awake.

THE EGO. What have I done?

CONSCIENCE. You've just confessed what you've done! Always thinking of that girl!

THE EGO. Why shouldn't I?

CONSCIENCE. Let your conscience tell you why you shouldn't. You're neglecting your office work.

THE EGO. *I?*

CONSCIENCE. You're deteriorating all round. Your sloppy ways are becoming the talk of the whole staff!

THE EGO (*covering his face with his hands*). I'm sorry! I'm sorry!

CONSCIENCE. You *will* be sorry, my friend, if you're not mighty careful—and mighty quickly, too.

THE EGO. I will be! I will be! Please leave me alone now.

CONSCIENCE. I shall do nothing of the kind. I've been meaning to have it out with you for a long time. . . . What time did you arrive at the office this morning?

THE EGO. Not now! Not now! I'm so tired. I'll tell you to-morrow.

CONSCIENCE (*raising his voice*). How long did you take over lunch?

THE EGO (*resigning himself*). How long was it, Memory?

MEMORY. H'm. It was striking twelve as we went out, and we hadn't been back five minutes before the postman turned up with the one-thirty delivery. . . .

CONSCIENCE. One hour and twenty-five minutes! Five and twenty minutes over the time allotted!

THE EGO (*weakly*). I had to post a letter on the way.

CONSCIENCE (*inexorably*). And *did* you post that letter?

THE EGO (*in sudden panic*). Did I? My God! . . . Memory?

MEMORY (*exerting himself*). Let me try and recall the route we followed on leaving the office. First we turned down by the Bank—so missing the Pillar Box at the corner——

THE EGO. Damned fool that I was!

MEMORY. We went into that sweetshop to get some caramels . . . met Randall outside the post-office . . .

THE EGO (*eagerly*). The post-office—yes?

MEMORY. We stood about talking—until Randall looked at his watch and rushed away cursing. Then——

THE EGO (*with bated breath*). Then——?

MEMORY. We lit a cigarette . . . our last; looked round to see if there was a tobacconist in sight, and—and, yes, happening to notice someone posting a letter——

THE EGO (*joyfully*). We remembered! Thank heaven! Oh, what a fright you gave me!

MEMORY. I recollect remarking that the stamp had been put on crooked.

CONSCIENCE (*severely*). If you've quite finished, Memory!

MEMORY. I beg your pardon. I had completely forgotten your existence.

CURIOSITY. Who was the letter addressed to?

CONSCIENCE. Hold your tongue, you! And do you (*To THE EGO.*) listen to me, young man.

THE EGO. Let him speak, all of you.

CONSCIENCE. All I have to say is this. Make what excuses you like, but the fact remains—you are going to the dogs. Either you give up your bird—or you *get* the bird.

FEAR (*moving forward in terror*). You can't mean that?

CONSCIENCE. Don't say I didn't warn you, that's all.

FEAR. Oh, I'm lost, I'm ruined. This is the end of all.

HOPE (*joining them*). Don't be a fool! He's hopelessly exaggerating the case. There's no danger at present.

CONSCIENCE. Not if you take the precaution of giving up the girl.

LIFE FORCE. I won't give her up. Nothing will induce me to.

FEAR. But think what you're risking! Your whole career is in the balance! You'll never get a job anywhere else!

HOPE. Rot!

FEAR. You heard what he said?

HOPE. Pah! Conscience! What does he know about it?

FEAR. I believe every word.

HOPE. You would! Coward!

MEMORY (*mumbling to himself*). "Thus conscience doth make cowards . . ."

LIFE FORCE. I won't give up the girl—whatever happens!

CONSCIENCE. You're a young fool!

HOPE (*to LIFE FORCE*). Don't you mind what he says. I'm with you!

FEAR (*threatening LIFE FORCE from the other side*). You'll be the ruin of us!

THE EGO. What about my sleep to-night?

MEMORY. There. I'd forgotten again!

LIFE FORCE. I won't give up the girl!

THE EGO. If you'd give up talking about her!

CONSCIENCE. I propose we adjourn the discussion. Sleep's a very important function, after all.

THE EGO. Hear, hear! We'll put it to the vote! Those in favor of shutting up? (CONSCIENCE, LIFE FORCE, FEAR and HOPE signify the same in the usual way.) Those against? (MEMORY and CURIOSITY respond.) The ayes have it, thank goodness!

LIFE FORCE. Till the morning, then!

(He retires in company with FEAR and HOPE—to the background. MEMORY and CURIOSITY settle down.

THE EGO prepares to sleep. There is a pause. Then MELODY steals out again on her old stunt.)

CURIOSITY (in a whisper). What is that tune?

MEMORY (ditto). I wish I could remember.

THE EGO. Whatever put it into my head? A beastly tune!

MEMORY. Isn't it that thing from "The Tales of Hoffmann"?

CURIOSITY. Of course!

(MELODY continues the strain.)

THE EGO. Shut up! (MELODY stops.) If I must be tortured in this way, at least let it be something better than that rotten, hackneyed tune!

MELODY. I'm sorry if I don't give satisfaction, sir. Might I suggest something rather more classical—a Bach Fugue, now, or a Beethoven Symphony? Or possibly you would fancy a rag-time?

(He commences one, prancing grotesquely in synco-pation.)

THE EGO. Leave me alone! Leave me alone! I won't have it, I tell you! . . . I will go to sleep! I will! (He tries again—once more MELODY breaks out softly.) Back to your kennel! Do you hear me? (Another pause, and again MELODY obliges.) I shall murder somebody!

CONSCIENCE. Come, come now, it's no good exciting yourself!

THE EGO (*by this time quite beside himself*). Will you shut up? I *will* excite myself! Do you hear me? I'm *going* to excite myself! I'm boss here, and don't you forget it!

CURIOSITY (*suddenly*). What's that noise outside? I believe it's a burglar!

THE EGO. If I don't curb my curiosity!

(*He goes for him.*)

MEMORY (*shaking his head*). This is the worst night I can remember. (*He rises in some alarm.*)

THE EGO. You will never remember another!

(*He rushes at him, closes with him and downs him.*)

CURIOSITY (*rising*). I wonder what a burglar looks like. I've always wanted to see one.

(*All the other CHARACTERS have gradually come forward, closing round them.*)

FEAR. He'll have a revolver for a certainty. We shall be murdered in our beds. That'll be the end of it!

THE EGO (*having finished with MEMORY*). Your turn!

(*He attacks FEAR.*)

MEMORY (*rising*). They say there was a burglary in this road only a couple of weeks ago.

(*MELODY breaks into the old tune again, fortissimo.*)

THE EGO (*leaving FEAR to hurl himself at MELODY*). Soothe the savage breast, would you?

FEAR (*rising*). I always said we should come to a violent end!

HOPE. Ridiculous! It's probably a blind flapping somewhere.

THE EGO (*leaving MELODY*). Et tu, Brute!

(*He hurls himself at HOPE. MELODY, rising, renews his warble.*)

LIFE FORCE. Where's Marjory? Oh, if I could only save her!

THE EGO (*leaving* HOPE). Save yourself!

(*He struggles violently with LIFE FORCE.*)

HOPE (*rising*). Never say die!

CONSCIENCE (*to* THE EGO). Be careful what you're doing now!

THE EGO. This is a conspiracy! I'm going mad!

(*He leaves MELODY and charges at CONSCIENCE.*)

LIFE FORCE. Marjory! Marjory!

(*During the following, all speak at once, THE EGO hurling himself at the speakers in turn.*)

MEMORY (*quite calmly*). Our nerves have been getting gradually worse ever since I can remember. And yet there was a time when we slept as heartily as a little child. What ages ago it seems. That delightful holiday we spent in Devonshire with those people who lived in Surbiton, etc.

CURIOSITY (*showing mild interest*). What a funny state of mind we are in. I wonder if there's anything really the matter with us. I must look it up in the Encyclopædia Britannica to-morrow, etc.

FEAR (*shaking*). We're going to have a nervous breakdown! I knew we would. It's been coming on for years. We'll have brain fever and be laid up for months, and probably die at the end of it all, etc.

HOPE (*cheerfully*). It'll be all right in the morning. We shall refresh ourselves with a cold bath, and eat a good breakfast, and the sun will be shining and the birds singing, and we shall live happily ever after, etc.

LIFE FORCE (*rapturously*). Oh, Marjory! Marjory! I wish she could know how ill I am; she'd be so sympathetic. I hope I *do* get ill, and she comes and nurses me. What joy that will be, etc.

(*MELODY sings blithely on.*)

CONSCIENCE (*rebuking them in turn*). Now then, now

then, what's the good of going on like this? Keep calm, can't you? It's all your own fault. You shouldn't be carrying on like this with that sweetheart of yours, etc.

(In the middle of the confusion, to strains of music, a CHORUS OF NERVES, little bobbing figures in jazz colored overalls, wielding red-hot poker, emerge from all sides, prodding and tumbling the other CHARACTERS in all directions, finally joining hands and jumping around THE EGO, to his despair and fury, as the curtain descends.)

CURTAIN

N. B. The "Nerves" may be dispensed with, if necessary, the other characters performing their function, so far as possible.

"THIRST"

A Play

By

J. J. BELL

As an author, Mr. J. J. Bell has an amazing record for versatility and volume of accomplishment. His mind and pen seem always at work, either on some grim tragedy or on a humorous creation in the lightest vein. His fiction or sea stories would have made his reputation, but the amusing sketches of Scottish character, like "Wee Macgregor," have made his fame secure. Mr. Bell lives and works in Glasgow, and, because of his incomparable insight and skill in interpreting the Scottish temperament, he is the most popular living humorist in Scotland. In his varying efforts as an author, Mr. Bell has not neglected the theatre. Several of his character types, including "Wee Macgregor," appear in the comedies, while his one-act plays are often intensely dramatic. Mr. Bell's already published plays include: "THE PIE IN THE OVEN," "THREAD O' SCARLET," "THOSE CLASS DISTINCTIONS," "WEE MACGREGOR'S PARTY," "COURTIN' CHRISTINA," and "WOLVES."

"THIRST" is a powerful little play for three men only. For producing dramatic effect, there is no more characteristic specimen of Mr. Bell's writing for the stage.

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PERSONS REPRESENTED

LORD SHANDON.
DUKE SHAFTO.
GROYD.

“THIRST”

The SCENE is a dungeon in the Castle of Shafto. Through the high-barred window comes a beam of moonlight; it falls full on the prisoner huddled and slumbering in a corner, and faintly illuminates the cell. The prisoner (LORD SHANDON) is in fetters, which, while chaining him to the wall, permit a certain freedom of movement to his limbs. He appears wretched and unkempt on his bed of straw. On the floor to his left is a platter of meat; on a stool to his right an empty bowl. The dungeon is void of furniture. In one of the walls is a hook, from which a lantern may be suspended. The door is at back of stage.

(As the curtain rises, a bell begins to toll midnight. On the last stroke DUKE SHAFTO, accompanied by GROVD [the jailer] opens the door. SHAFTO takes lantern from GROVD'S hand, signs to GROVD to remain where he is, and enters dungeon. Drawing near to the prisoner, SHAFTO regards him for some moments with a grin of mockery. Thereafter he turns the lantern on the platter of meat, and nods his head in a satisfied fashion. Next he takes up the bowl, glances at GROVD, examines the bowl, glances again at GROVD, who shrinks; inverts bowl; places lantern on stool; takes piece of rag from among straw and with it wipes out bowl; replaces bowl on stool; drops rag with gesture of disgust. He then takes up lantern, looks once more at prisoner, and goes out softly. He halts beside GROVD.)

SHAFTO (*threateningly*). Once more, remember—no water. (GROVD *cringes humbly*.) Hah! thy back smarts still? 'Tis well! (*With a gesture*.) Shut!

(The door is closed; a key is turned; bolts are shot.)

SHANDON (*stirs, wakes and mutters*). Water! . . .

Water! . . . Cold, sweet well water! Gift of all gifts from God to man! Now let me drink! (*Sits up and stretches forth hand, gropingly, for bowl.*) Let me drink. (*Finds bowl.*) Ah! (*Puts bowl to lips.*) God! (*Bowl slips from his fingers and falls among the straw.*) A dream! (*Falls back.*) A dream! (*Covers face.*) I dreamed the sun was hot, the journey long, but we glad travellers came at last to a well of water, clear as crystal. I dreamed my dear, true wife did make a loving cup of her fair white hands . . . (*Sits up suddenly. Shouts hoarsely and wildly.*) Water! Water! Help! I thirst! I die! In the name of Christ, a cup of cold water! (*Sounds of key turning and bolts being withdrawn.*) Haste, friend, haste! I perish! Come, good Groyd; come quickly! Ah! (*The door opens. GROVD, glancing fearfully behind him, enters.*) Water!

GROYD (*in low voice, humbly, sorrowfully*). My lord, my lord!

SHANDON. A cup of water, good Groyd. Be swift. (*GROYD sighs and shakes his head.*) This thirst is more than I can bear. My tongue—my throat—oh, make haste!

GROYD. My lord, my lord.

SHANDON. Water, man! I ask thee for water. Wherefore lingerest?

GROYD. My lord—I dare not.

SHANDON. Dare not? (*GROYD bows his head.*) Dare not?—Because the last of my gold pieces lieth safe in thy pouch? (*Reproachfully.*) Oh, Groyd!

GROYD. Nay, nay, my lord. 'Tis true I have ta'en thy gold. I am a poor man, and my poor wife lieth sick. Yet —

SHANDON (*containing himself, and adopting a wheedling tone*). Well, well, my friend, thou didst earn the gold. The Duke, he is thy master—to whom all obedience. Oh, I grudge thee not the gold. Nay more, I tell thee, we are quits, good Groyd. Yet come! make me thy debtor. It haps that I have but now waked from a dream—a dream of sweet well water. I would be thy debtor—

I, the Lord Shandon, would be thy debtor in a small matter. I say, I have waked from a dream . . .
(*Breaks down.*) Oh, man, for Christ's sake, a cup of water—a drop of water! This anguish of thirst ——

GROYD. It were thine, my lord, if I dared—if I dared. But they spy upon me, the poor jailer.

SHANDON. Spy on thee! Wherefore ——

GROYD. The Duke trusteth me no longer. He hath his spies—I know not where. Of late he hath commanded “*No water*”; yet have I given thee water. Yea, thou hast paid me. Yet (*Shuddering.*) I also have paid.

SHANDON (*unheeding*). A little, tiny drop of water. Who would deny a thirsty man a little, tiny drop of water?

GROYD (*groans, goes to door, looks furtively out, and returns*). My lord, dost remember the wetted cloth I brought thee by stealth yestereven?

SHANDON (*alert*). Surely. 'Twas a sweet refreshment. (*Stretches forth eager hands.*) Thou hast it there, good Groyd? Quick, now, for I burn, I ——

GROYD. Would that I had it here. Alas, alas! But that which I did yestereven was made known within the hour to my master the Duke. At midnight—oh, my lord!—he, with his own hand, scourged my back to bloody ribbons.

SHANDON (*aghast*). Alas, poor Groyd!

(*Puts his hands to his head.*)

GROYD. So even I have paid somewhat for thy drink, my lord. If I fail again, 'twill be my head.

SHANDON (*with gesture of dismissal*). I thank thee. . . . Go. I will endure the torment.

GROYD. If thou couldst endure but a day. (*Draws a little nearer.*) List, my lord. 'Tis rumored that the old King is sick unto death.

SHANDON. My enemy who hath done this unto me! (*Clasps hands as in prayer.*) O Death, make speed,—make speed!

GROYD. Then what they say is true? The King's

death would mean thy freedom? The prince, his son, is not thine enemy ——

SHANDON. 'Tis true, 'tis true. My freedom—my lady—my little ones! Oh, God, bid Thy servant Death smite swiftly.

GROYD (*diffidently*). 'Tis said, also, my master the Duke is fain to have thy lady ——

SHANDON (*raising clenched hands*). Wherefore he seeketh to destroy me ere the King can die. But I will live! I will live! (*Gasps and clutches throat*.) Oh, this thirst! (*Puts hand to head*.) Hammers beat in my brain. Anguish! But I will endure. (*With a great effort to be calm*.) Groyd, my friend, I would write a letter.

GROYD. A letter, my lord! How shall a letter escape from this castle? The Duke hath eyes everywhere.

SHANDON (*patiently*). I would write a letter to my lady in her castle of Verniton.

GROYD. To write were easy. To send ——

(*Throws out arm in gesture of hopelessness*.)

SHANDON (*gently*). Peace, peace! The letter would instruct my lady to pay unto the bearer five hundred pieces of gold. And my ring would go with it for a sign.

GROYD (*in astonishment*). Five hundred pieces of gold! Enough for a poor man's lifetime.

SHANDON (*softly*). For the lifetime of a poor man whose wife lieth sick.

GROYD. Oh, my lord, tempt me not.

SHANDON. Dost doubt my lady would promptly pay the bearer?

GROYD. Nay, nay. Not with my lord's ring for a sign.

SHANDON. Then hearken, Groyd. I will give the letter and ring to him who will bring to me this little bowl —(*Takes bowl from among straw*.)—this little bowl filled with—water. (*Looking steadily at GROYD*.) Wilt fetch me now the wherewithal to write? (*GROYD despairingly puts his hand to his head*.) Believe me, friend, that poor, flayed back of thine is but a tiny agony to this

thirst of body and mind. Time will heal that back, but every little moment doth increase this fever of hell. (GROYD drops his hand with a groan.) Dost still doubt? (Removes ring from finger.) Then take it for a pledge that I will surely give thee the letter. Take it.

GROYD (recoiling). My lord, my lord! (Goes softly to door, peers out fearfully and comes back. In a nervous whisper.) Give me the bowl—nay, not the ring. Thy need is greater than mine. (Takes bowl.) Perchance he will not come again to-night. Perchance his spies now sleep. Thou shalt have thy water.

SHANDON (in gush of gratitude). Now may the dear Christ remember thee!

GROYD. *Sh!* [Goes out stealthily.]

SHANDON (rubbing his hands). He shall have a thousand pieces of gold. My children shall be taught to pray for him. My lady—oh, my sweet wife, my children dear! (Covers his face.) When shall I look upon their faces and hear their voices? God, let the King die speedily—this very hour! (Rocks himself as in pain.) Oh, double anguish of thirst and longing! (Calling aloud.) Hasten, hasten, good Groyd! (Becomes motionless in attitude of listening.) Hah! He comes! He comes with my sweet well water. May the love of God abide upon him forever. He comes. (GROYD enters with bowl.) Ah!

GROYD (huskily). For the sake of Christ only I have brought thee this water. Pray for my sick wife.

(Advances holding out bowl. Very swiftly, very quietly SHAFTO glides into dungeon and lays hand on GROYD's shoulder.)

SHAFTO. Fool! Didst think to trick me? (The bowl falls to the ground.) To-morrow I will deal with thee. Hence! But first thy lantern.

SHANDON (crying). My water! my sweet well water. (Tries vainly to reach the water spilled on floor. At the same time GROYD gives up lantern and stumbles from the dungeon.) My sweet well water!

SHAFTO (*who appears somewhat intoxicated, hanging lantern on hook in wall*). Good even, my lord. But is't a fair and honorable thing, think ye, to tempt a poor jailer? Five hundred pieces of gold. Fie upon thee! (SHANDON *glares at him*.) Art hungered, beast? (Smiles.) So soon? (SHANDON *snarls*.) 'Tis but fifteen hours since I sent thee a ploughman's portion of good meat. (Peers at platter.) What? not yet consumed! Was't lacking in salt? (Laughs.) Nay; for I seasoned it with mine own hands. (SHANDON *tugs at his fetters*.) Then what dost thou desire? Wine, cool and fragrant? The grapes of Muscadel? Sweet oranges from Jaffa? Juicy pomegranates? Luscious English peaches? Pears from ——

SHANDON (*drooping*). Water—for the love of Christ, water.

SHAFTO (*carelessly*). So thou art thirsty! Water? 'Tis past midnight—overlate, methinks, to go to the well. Perchance to-morrow—or the day after—or again the day after—thou shalt have water. Perchance, I say.

SHANDON. Oh, mock me not.

SHAFTO (*lightly*). Heigh-ho! I also am athirst. 'Tis full an hour since I supped—with the Lady Beatrice ——

SHANDON (*starting up*). Liar!

SHAFTO. —in spirit, my lord, in spirit. (Laughs.) Yea; I still sup solitary. But not for long—not for long! The Lady Beatrice ——

SHANDON. Never! My wife ——

SHAFTO. I speak not of thy wife, but of thy widow. (*With change of tone*.) But say, what wouldst give for thy freedom?

SHANDON. My freedom! Dost ask in good earnest? (SHAFTO *laughs and nods carelessly*.) Then, my Lord Duke, I would give my Castle of Taransay with all pertaining to it, and my lands of Larmonth, and—yea, and the half of my fortune. (*Eagerly*.) Wilt take it?

SHAFTO (*yawning*). Nay, nay; I was but curious. Offer me all, and I would not let thee go. His Majesty the King gave me charge over thee.

SHANDON. Yet not to torment me, body and soul.

SHAFTO (*yawning again*). But I shall have all—all—when the King and thou art gone.

SHANDON (*writhing*). Monster! (*Putting hand to head.*) Water!

SHAFTO (*with faint interest*). Art indeed so thirsty? How long, I wonder, must thirst endure ere it burneth the life from a man? Doubtless, the man doth first go mad. Perchance to-morrow I shall behold thee mad. I am minded that to-morrow my trusty servant Groyd must lose his head—nay, I shall hang him for an example to thy new jailer.

SHANDON (*weakly*). Spare him.

SHAFTO. 'Twas thou who wouldst not spare him. Verily, he had his warning. (*Yawning and stretching himself.*) Yea; I also am athirst. I will go and drink.

(*Moves towards door.*)

SHANDON (*breaking down*). Oh, oh!

(*Weeps piteously.*)

SHAFTO (*halting*). Nay, if thy spirit be so broken; if naught will avail thee but that thou must drink—why, then—(*Puts whistle to lips and blows.*) thou shalt drink. Wine—the wine I love the most—shall be set before thee. Even now it cometh. (*A SERVANT enters, bearing a tray on which are two goblets exactly similar in appearance. SHAFTO takes tray. To SERVANT.*) Hence! (*To SHANDON.*) Yea; thou shalt drink, (*Sets tray on stool.*) if such be truly thy desire—(*Laughs.*) if such be truly thy desire.

SHANDON. For this great mercy, may God —

SHAFTO. Peace! (*Places stool and tray within SHANDON'S reach.*) Behold, my lord, these twin goblets of the wine I love most of all. Take thy choice, my Lord Shandon, take thy choice. (*Eagerly SHANDON puts forth his hand.*) But stay—stay! 'Tis but right to tell thee all. One of these twin goblets—'fore God, I know not which—containeth more than good wine. (*SHANDON again puts forth his hand.*) Not yet, my lord! One containeth all the bitterness and agony of death. Poison!

SHANDON (*recoiling*). Saviour of Mercy!

SHAFTO (*retiring a little way*). 'Tis for thee to choose. I do not force thee. I do not ask thee to drink of one or other. In the meanwhile I will inform the Lady Beatrice that her present lord and master thinks not of her, being wholly engrossed in pondering over a matter of life and death. Fare thee well for a little space.

SHANDON (*frantic*). Art man or devil?

SHAFTO (*smiling*). I have been called both. The Lady Beatrice —

SHANDON (*hotly*). Swine! Keep thy tongue from her name! She will have none of thee. Imagine it not. Her castle of Verniton is strong—strong. Her retainers are loyal. I fear not —

SHAFTO (*retiring to doorway*). The Lady Beatrice no longer lodgeth in her castle of Verniton.

SHANDON (*wildly*). What sayest thou?

SHAFTO (*smiling*). Snared by a simple ruse, she is safely lodged in the castle of Shafto—here—my prisoner! Fare thee well until I come again.

(*Goes out laughing. His laughter gradually dies in the distance.*)

SHANDON (*falling back*). 'Tis the very end of all. (*Struggles up again.*) Nay, nay! (*Tugs frantically at fetters.*) I must live to feel my hand at his vile throat. I must live to see my own again—my lady wife—my little ones! I must live — (*Clutches his throat.*) This hellish thirst! (*Gazes at goblets. Shudders and covers his eyes a while. Then his hands slide downwards, and he gazes at goblets once more.*) Which? (*Takes up and smells one goblet after the other.*) God, I cannot tell. (*Dips a finger cautiously in the first goblet, and tastes; does likewise with the second goblet.*) I cannot tell. There is naught of difference. Give me a sign, oh merciful Heaven. Direct my hand. How I thirst! —be merciful, be merciful. (*Covers eyes with left hand and feels towards goblets with right.*) Direct my hand. (*Touches goblet, hesitates, then clutches it.*) If it be death, 'tis the will of God. (*Drops hand from eyes and*

stares at goblet.) Courage, courage! If it quencheth not this thirst, 'twill surely end it. Let me drink. (*Puts cup to his lips, yet hesitates to drink. Suddenly.*) My lady—my wife—his prisoner! How can I die? How can I chance aught to hasten death? Oh, God, is this Thy mercy, is this Thy mercy? (*The cup slips from his hands and falls among the straw. Shouting.*) Groyd! . . . Groyd! . . . Groyd! (*He sways.*) Water!

(*He collapses and falls sideways in a huddled heap. A bell clangs in the distance. A moment later SHAFTO enters hurriedly, unsteadily.*)

SHAFTO (*halting and regarding his victim with drunken gravity*). Hah! Thou hast chosen. 'Tis well and none too soon. And Shafto doth win! (*Yawns and staggers. Bell clangs again.*) Who rings? A courier? In the name of Hell, what news so late? (*Turns to go. Halts.*) But how I thirst! Truly the disease seemeth catching. (*Laughs. Spies goblet on stool and goes towards it.*) My lord, I thank thee for thy leavings! The wine I love most of all. (*Takes up goblet. Presenting it to SHANDON.*) To you, my lord—(*Raising goblet above his head and grinning upwards.*) to you, my lady—my lady now in very sooth (*Laughs.*) I drink! (*He drains goblet and laughs loud and long. But of a sudden he ceases. He takes a step towards the door, and halts wavering. He gasps. The goblet slips from his hand; his hand flies first to his throat, then to his head. He shrieks.*) Help! help! Hither to me! Groyd! Groyd! Quickly! I burn—I burn! Water for the love of Christ! Ah-h-h!

(*Tearing at his throat, he reels and falls. Convulsions seize him. Slowly with difficulty, SHANDON sits up, peering. And all at once he breaks into immoderate laughter. SHAFTO'S movements cease. He lies with his face turned to the roof. GROVD is heard shouting along the passage.*)

GROYD (*without*). My Lord Duke, my Lord Duke!

A courier from the Court. (*Appears in doorway.*) A courier, my lord. The King is dead.

(*Catches sight of SHAFTO, and halts as if paralyzed.*
SHANDON goes on laughing.)

CURTAIN

